
Gonorrhoea

Summary

- Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmissible infection. Anyone who is sexually active is at risk of infection and should be tested for gonorrhoea.
 - It may occur without symptoms, especially in women.
 - Gonorrhoea is treatable but can lead to infertility in women if left untreated.
 - Always have safe sex – use condoms (male and female) and dams for all types of sex to prevent gonorrhoea infection. Remember that gonorrhoea may be spread through unprotected oral sex.
 - It is important to let your sexual partner or partners know that you have gonorrhoea so that they can be tested and treated. Your local doctor or sexual health centre can help you to do this.
-

What is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is a **sexually transmissible infection (STI)** caused by the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. It usually affects the genital area, although the throat or anus (rectum) may also be affected.

Gonorrhoea affects men and women and is easily transmitted during vaginal sex. It can also be transmitted during anal or **oral sex**.

Gonococcal conjunctivitis (red, sore eyes) can occur in babies who have had contact with the mother's infected birth canal during childbirth. It may cause vision loss if not rapidly and adequately treated.

Who is at risk of gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is a common STI. It can affect anyone who has unprotected sex (without condoms) with someone who has the infection.

Some people who are at increased risk of gonorrhoea include:

- Men who have sex with men.
- Female partners of men who have sex with men.
- Heterosexual men and women – particularly if they have multiple sexual partners, are travellers returning from countries where gonorrhoea is prevalent, or inject drugs.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Sex workers.
- Anyone diagnosed with an STI (such as **HIV**, **syphilis** and **chlamydia**).

What are the symptoms of gonorrhoea?

The symptoms of gonorrhoea are slightly different in men and women.

Symptoms of gonorrhoea in women

Often, women with gonorrhoea experience no symptoms. This can lead to gonorrhoea going undetected for longer in women if they are not tested regularly.

Symptoms of gonorrhoea in women may include:

- unusual vaginal discharge
 - pain while urinating
-

- pain during sex.

Symptoms of gonorrhoea in men

Gonorrhoea commonly infects the inside of the penis (the urethra).

Symptoms of gonorrhoea in men may include:

- Burning sensation while urinating.
- White or yellow pus-like discharge from the penis (may be observed in underwear).
- Swelling and pain in the testicles – which can occur if the gonorrhoea infection goes untreated.

In a small percentage of men there are no symptoms at all.

Symptoms of oral and anal gonorrhoea

In both men and women:

- Anal gonorrhoea often occurs without signs or symptoms.
- Gonorrhoea in the throat may cause a sore throat – however, it usually occurs without symptoms.

Gonorrhoea can cause infertility in women

If left untreated, gonorrhoea can lead to **pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)** in women, which can cause infertility.

Symptoms of PID include:

- lower abdominal pain and tenderness
- deep pain during sexual intercourse
- heavy and painful periods
- fever.

Women who have had PID need to be especially careful about gonorrhoea and **chlamydia**. The risk of infertility increases with each bout of inflammation, especially if left untreated for long periods.

How often should I get checked for gonorrhoea?

Sexual health check-ups are recommended for anyone who is sexually active. If you are sexually active, get a full sexual health check (including tests for syphilis, HIV, gonorrhoea and chlamydia) at least once a year.

The frequency of these checks depends on your STI risk:

- Men who have sex with men, and have more than 1 partner – should get checked every 3 to 6 months.
- A man who has sex with another man (has 1 partner) – get checked once a year.
- Sexually active women who have new sexual partners or feel they are at risk of STI (because gonorrhoea may not cause symptoms until PID has already developed).

How is gonorrhoea diagnosed?

Having a regular sexual health check-up with your local GP (doctor) or sexual health centre can detect gonorrhoea. The doctor or nurse will ask you for a:

- urine sample (peeing in a small jar)
- swab test – from the urethra, cervix, anus or throat.

Getting your gonorrhoea test results

Test results are normally available within a week.

How is gonorrhoea treated?

Gonorrhoea is treated effectively with antibiotics.

Symptoms resolve quickly – usually within a week. Tell your doctor or nurse if you still have symptoms.

Avoid having any type of sex (not even with condoms or internal protection such as dams) until treatment is

finished.

Some strains of gonorrhoea are now resistant to many antibiotics.

Your GP (doctor) will know what antibiotic to prescribe based on the current treatment guidelines.

Tell your GP if you have been travelling overseas because many of the new resistant strains have originated outside Australia.

Can you get reinfected with gonorrhoea?

Having gonorrhoea once does not protect you from getting it again. Even after you've been successfully treated, you can still be reinfected by having sex with a partner who has gonorrhoea.

Letting partners know you have gonorrhoea

It is important to let your sexual partner or partners know that you have gonorrhoea. Most people will appreciate being told they may have an infection and it is an important step in preventing further infection in the community. If your partner is treated it will also prevent you from getting the infection again.

Your local GP and sexual health centre can help you inform your partners and let them know that they need a test. This process is called 'partner notification'. It can be done anonymously, and your confidentiality is always respected. Letting your partners know will also prevent you from getting the infection again.

You can also anonymously notify your sexual partners of the need to get tested and treated for gonorrhoea via the **Let Them Know** website if you feel unable to speak to them personally.

There are also nurses (called partner notification officers) who can help you anonymously notify your partners. They can be contacted on **(03) 9096 3367**.

Reducing gonorrhoea transmission

Ways you can reduce your risk of catching gonorrhoea include:

- Always have safe sex – use **condoms** and water-based lubricant (lube) for all types of sex. Female, (or internal) condoms can also be used for vaginal or anal sex.
- If you are sexually active, get a full sexual health check (including tests for syphilis, HIV and chlamydia) at least once a year.
- If you are at greater risk of STIs, get tested regularly. Men who have sex with men should get a syphilis test and tests for other STIs at least yearly, and up to 4 times a year if you have several partners.
- Remember, gonorrhoea may be spread through unprotected oral sex.

Where to get help

- Your **doctor / GP**
- Your school nurse or school welfare coordinator
- Some secondary schools provide access to an **adolescent health trained GP on site**
- Your local community health service
- **Family Planning Victoria** Tel. **1800 013 952** or **(03) 9257 0100**
- **Melbourne Sexual Health Centre** Tel. **(03) 9341 6200** or **1800 032 017** or TTY (for the hearing impaired) **(03) 9347 8619**
- **Thorne Harbour Health** (formerly Victorian AIDS Council) Tel. **(03) 9865 6700** or **1800 134 840**
- **The Centre Clinic**, St Kilda Tel. **(03) 9525 5866**
- **Equinox Gender Diverse Health Centre** Tel. **(03) 9416 2889**
- **PRONTO!** Tel. **(03) 9416 2889**
- **Ballarat Community Health Sexual Health Clinic** Tel. **(03) 5338 4500**
- **Bendigo Community Health Sexual Health Clinic** Tel. **(03) 5434 4300** Or **(03) 5448 1600**
- **Gateway Health Clinic 35**, Wodonga Tel. **(02) 6022 8888** or **1800657 573**

- **Sunraysia Community Health Services** Tel. **(03) 5022 5444**
- **Barwon Health Sexual Health Clinic** Tel. **(03) 5226 7489**
- **Victorian Supercare Pharmacies**
- **1800MyOptions** Tel: **1800 696784** is a statewide phone service for information about sexual health as well as contraception and pregnancy options
- **Victorian Aboriginal Health Service** Tel: **(03) 9419 3000**.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2020 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.