Gonorrhoea

Summary

- Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmissible infection.
- It may occur without symptoms, especially in women.
- Gonorrhoea can lead to infertility in women if left untreated.
- Use condoms (male and female) and dams to prevent gonorrhoea infection.
- Anyone who is sexually active should be tested for gonorrhoea.

What is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmissible infection caused by the bacterium Neisseria gonorrhoeae. It usually affects the genital area, although the throat or anus (back passage) may also be affected. Gonorrhoea affects both men and women and is easily transmitted during vaginal sex. It can also be transmitted during anal or oral sex.

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 than in men (who more often experience symptoms), if not tested for regularly.

Symptoms of gonorrhoea in women may include:
- an unusual discharge from the vagina
- 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:
- a burning sensation while urinating
- a 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.

Treatment of gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is treated with antibiotics. Some strains of gonorrhoea are now resistant to many antibiotics.

Your GP 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.

Untreated gonorrhoea can lead to 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, because the risk of infertility increases with each bout of inflammation, especially if left untreated for long periods.

**Test for gonorrhoea**

Because gonorrhoea may not cause symptoms until PID has already developed, it is recommended that sexually active women who have recently had a change of sexual partner or feel they may be at risk of a sexually transmissible infection (STI) have a test for gonorrhoea.

**Prevention of gonorrhoea**

The best protection against gonorrhoea is to always use barrier protection such as condoms, female condoms and dams (a thin piece of latex placed over the anus or vulva during oral sex). Condoms and dams can be used for oro-vaginal sex and oro-anal sex to help prevent the spread of infection.

**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’s Action Centre Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03)9660 4700 (also is youth friendly)
- 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

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