

Gonorrhea Fact Sheet

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SOURCES:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- ❖ [Gonorrhea fact sheet](#)
- ❖ [Gonorrhea: The Facts](#)
- ❖ [2010 STD Treatment Guidelines](#)

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

- ❖ [Understanding Gonorrhea](#)

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a common bacterial infection that is sexually transmitted and often causes no symptoms. If not treated, gonorrhea can damage reproductive organs and make it difficult for a woman to have a baby.



What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can start within a few days or weeks after exposure to gonorrhea, and may be minor. Many women **may not** have symptoms. Men are more likely to have symptoms.

Women may experience:

- ❖ Unusual discharge or drip from the vagina.
- ❖ Burning and pain when they urinate
- ❖ If gonorrhea spreads to the reproductive organs (like the fallopian tubes) a woman may have pain in the abdomen or lower back; pain during sex; fever; or bleeding between her periods.

Men may experience:

- ❖ Discharge or drip from the penis
- ❖ Burning when they urinate

Men or women who have anal sex can also get gonorrhea, and may have pain, discharge, or even bleeding from the rectum.

It's also possible to get gonorrhea from oral sex. While there are usually no symptoms, some people will have a sore throat.



Testing/Diagnosis

There are several lab tests for gonorrhea that are reliable. Some are done with urine (as simple as "pee in a cup"), while others take a swab from the penis or cervix. Ask your healthcare provider if you have questions about testing options.

Pregnant women at risk for gonorrhea should be tested. Risk factors include being under age 25, previous infections with gonorrhea, having other STDs, a new sexual partner, more than one partner, or unprotected sex.



Anyone with genital symptoms (such as discharge, burning urination, or bleeding) should see their healthcare provider and be evaluated for STDs.

How common is gonorrhea?

More than 700,000 cases of gonorrhea are estimated to occur each year in the U.S., only about half of which are reported.



Treatment

Gonorrhea is cured with antibiotics, usually given as an injection. Treatment sometimes involves a one-time dose of an oral medication. Strains of gonorrhea that resist antibiotics are increasing, which makes treatment more difficult.

It's common for those with gonorrhea to also be infected with chlamydia, so medications are often given that work against both infections.

To make sure gonorrhea is cured:

- ❖ All partners should be tested and treated
- ❖ Take all of your medicine
- ❖ Reinfection is common, so get tested again about three months after being treated (especially if you don't know if your partner was treated).



What happens if gonorrhea is untreated?

Gonorrhea that isn't treated may cause complications:

- ❖ In women, gonorrhea may cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). This can happen when the infection spreads to the uterus or fallopian tubes. If untreated, PID can cause chronic pelvic pain and tubal pregnancies. PID can even damage the reproductive organs and make it hard for a woman to have a baby. Gonorrhea can also make it easier for women to contract an HIV infection.
- ❖ In pregnant women gonorrhea can be passed to their babies during delivery, which can cause serious problems in a newborn (such as eye and joint infections).



- ❖ While men don't often have complications with gonorrhea, sometimes an untreated infection can lead to infection and pain with the tube that carries sperm from the testes, epididymitis. Rarely, this can make it difficult for a man to get a woman pregnant.
- ❖ Gonorrhea infections can also spread to the blood or joints.

How do people get gonorrhea?

People can get gonorrhea through vaginal and anal sex. It's also possible to get the disease through oral sex. A pregnant woman can also give gonorrhea to her baby during delivery.



Reduce your risk

There are several things that can lower the risk of gonorrhea and other STDs:

- ❖ Use condoms or other latex barrier (such as a dental dam) for each sex act (oral, anal, and vaginal). A barrier should be put on before any sexual contact takes place.
- ❖ Having sex with only one partner (who only has sex with you)
- ❖ Appropriate testing and treatment. Talk with your healthcare provider to see what STD tests might be recommended for you.
- ❖ Talk to your partner

It can be hard to tell a partner that you have gonorrhea, but keep in mind that your partner can have it and not know. Tell all recent sex partners so they can be tested.

