

MWANANCHI'S HEALTH CONSULTANCY SERVICES

GONORRHEA (*NEISSERIA GONORRHOEAE*)

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

WHO GETS GONORRHEA?

Anyone who is sexually active can get gonorrhea, but those at greater risk include:

- Sexually active adolescents
- Persons diagnosed with any STD
- Persons with a sex partner diagnosed with any STD
- Persons with more than one sex partner
- Persons with a new sex partner

HOW IS GONORRHEA SPREAD?

Gonorrhea is usually spread by genital sexual contact, but the bacteria that cause gonorrhea can also infect the throat or rectum. Babies can get gonorrhea during birth if the mother has this infection.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF GONORRHEA?

One third of men and two-thirds of women infected with *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* never get any symptoms at all. If symptoms do occur in men they may include penile discharge, usually with painful and frequent urination. When symptoms are present in women they may include increased vaginal discharge, painful urination, lower back pain, and spotting between menstrual periods. These symptoms may occur alone or in combination and may range from barely noticeable to severe.

HOW SOON DO SYMPTOMS APPEAR?

When symptoms occur in men, they usually occur 3-5 days after sexual contact with an infected individual. Women who develop symptoms usually experience them within 10 days of sexual contact with an infected individual.

HOW LONG CAN A PERSON HAVE THIS INFECTION?

If untreated, gonorrhea infection may persist for many months, even without symptoms. During this time, damage to the reproductive organs in women can occur. The infection can move into the rest of the body and can cause painful arthritis or other complications. The infection can be transmitted to sex partners throughout this time.

DOES PAST INFECTION WITH GONORRHEA MAKE A PERSON IMMUNE?

No. Re-infection with *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* (the bacteria that causes gonorrhea) can occur any time a person is re-exposed.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR GONORRHEA?

Often prescribed are antibiotics such as cefixime, ceftriaxone or ciprofloxacin taken in a single dose and are usually followed by another antibiotic such as azithromycin, taken in a single dose or doxycycline, taken for a 7-day period. Co-infection with *Chlamydia trachomatis*, another sexually transmitted bacterium that causes STD, is common and this two-drug treatment will provide protection against both infections.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I HAD GONORRHEA AND DIDN'T GET TREATMENT?

Untreated gonorrhea, and especially re-infection of gonorrhea, is a major cause of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) which can prevent a woman from ever having a baby (infertility). PID can also cause scar tissue growth in the fallopian tube, ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus) and chronic pelvic pain.

HOW CAN I AVOID EXPOSURE TO THIS INFECTION?

If you don't have a mutually monogamous, steady, or lifelong sex partner, a condom can help protect you from exposure to gonorrhea and other sexually transmitted diseases.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE THIS INFECTION?

A test for gonorrhea that gives accurate, quick results is available at your doctor's office, family planning clinics and STD clinics. Early diagnosis and treatment are necessary to avoid serious complications and spread of this disease. If you test positive, all of your sex partners during the previous 3 months should be tested and treated for gonorrhea, even if they have no symptoms. Public health professionals from your local health department can help you with the task of contacting partners. If your sex partners have the infection and are not treated, you could get infected again if you have sex again with the same partners.

IF I HAVE GONORRHEA, CAN I HAVE OTHER STDS AS WELL?

Yes. It is possible to have more than one STD at a time. Different STDs are spread in the same manner through sexual contact (oral, anal, vaginal and penile). It is important to make an appointment at your doctor's office or clinic to be examined and tested for STDs as soon as you notice any unusual signs or symptoms or are aware of sexual exposure to someone with an STD.