

# Gonorrhea – Basic Fact Sheet



People who are sexually active can get **gonorrhea**, a common, treatable, sexually transmitted disease (STD). This fact sheet answers basic questions about gonorrhea.

## What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is an STD that can cause infection in the genitals, rectum, and throat. It is very common, especially among young people ages 15-24 years.

## How is gonorrhea spread?

You can get gonorrhea by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has gonorrhea. A pregnant person with gonorrhea can give the infection to their baby during childbirth.

## How can I reduce the risk of gonorrhea?

The only way to completely avoid STDs is to not have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

If you are sexually active, the following things can lower your chances of getting gonorrhea:

- Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and does not have gonorrhea.
- Using condoms the right way every time you have sex.

## Am I at risk for gonorrhea?

Sexually active people can get gonorrhea through vaginal, anal, or oral sex without a condom with a partner who has gonorrhea.

If you are sexually active, have an honest and open talk with your healthcare provider. Ask them if you should get tested for gonorrhea or other STDs. If you are a sexually active gay or bisexual man, you should get tested for gonorrhea every year.

If you are a sexually active woman, you should get tested for gonorrhea every year if you are:

- Younger than 25 years
- 25 years and older with risk factors, such as new or multiple sex partners, or a sex partner who has a sexually transmitted infection

## I'm pregnant. How does gonorrhea affect my baby?

If you are pregnant and have gonorrhea, you can give the infection to your baby during delivery. This can cause serious health problems for your baby. If you are pregnant, talk to your healthcare provider about getting the correct examination, testing, and treatment. Treating gonorrhea as soon as possible will make health problems for your baby less likely.

## How do I know if I have gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea often has no symptoms, but it can cause serious health problems, even without symptoms.

Most women with gonorrhea do not have any symptoms. Even when a woman has symptoms, they are often mild and can be mistaken for a bladder or vaginal infection. **Symptoms in women can include:**

- Painful or burning sensation when peeing
- Increased vaginal discharge
- Vaginal bleeding between periods.



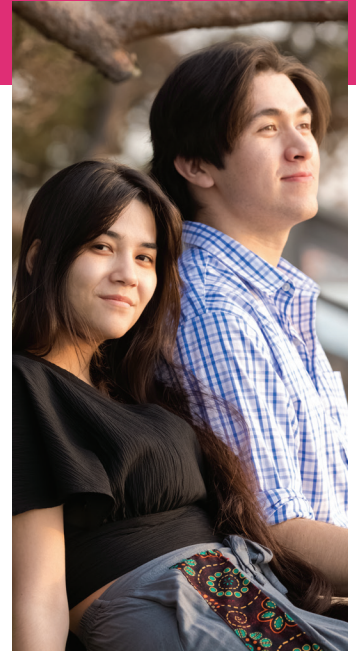
**Men who do have symptoms may have:**

- A burning sensation when peeing
- A white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis
- Painful or swollen testicles (although this is less common)

**Rectal infections may either cause no symptoms or cause symptoms in both men and women that may include:**

- Discharge
- Anal itching
- Soreness
- Bleeding
- Painful bowel movements

**See your healthcare provider if you notice any of these symptoms.** You should also see a provider if your partner has an STD or symptoms of one. Symptoms can include an unusual sore, a smelly discharge, burning when peeing, or bleeding between periods.

**How will my healthcare provider know if I have gonorrhea?**

Most of the time, a healthcare provider will use a urine sample to diagnose gonorrhea. However, if you have had oral and/or anal sex, your healthcare provider may use swabs to collect samples from your throat and/or rectum. In some cases, a healthcare provider may also use a swab to collect a sample from a man's urethra (urine canal) or a woman's cervix (opening to the womb)

**Is there a cure for gonorrhea?**

Yes, the right treatment can cure gonorrhea. It is important that you take all of the medicine your healthcare provider gives you to cure your infection. Do not share medicine for gonorrhea with anyone. Although medicine will stop the infection, it will not undo any permanent damage caused by the disease.

It is becoming harder to treat some gonorrhea, as drug-resistant strains of gonorrhea are increasing. Return to a healthcare provider if your symptoms continue for more than a few days after receiving treatment.

**When can I have sex again after my gonorrhea treatment?**

Wait seven days after finishing all medicine before having sex. You and your sex partner(s) should avoid having sex until you have each completed treatment and your symptoms are gone. This will help prevent you and your partner(s) from giving or getting gonorrhea again. Those with gonorrhea should be retested about three months after treatment of an initial infection, even if their partners received successful treatment.

If you've had gonorrhea and took medicine in the past, you can still get it again. This can happen even if you have sex with a condom with a person who has gonorrhea.

**What happens if I don't receive treatment?**

Untreated gonorrhea can cause serious and permanent health problems. In men, gonorrhea can cause a painful condition in the tubes attached to the testicles, which can, in rare cases, lead to infertility. In women, untreated gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). **Some of the complications of PID are:**

- Formation of scar tissue that blocks fallopian tubes
- Ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the womb)
- Infertility (not being able to get pregnant)
- Long-term pelvic/abdominal pain

Rarely, untreated gonorrhea can also spread to your blood or joints. This condition can be life-threatening.

**Untreated gonorrhea may also increase your chances of getting or giving HIV.**