

# Gonorrhea

## What is gonorrhea?

- Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.
- Most cases are in young adults (<25 years).
- Over the years, gonorrhea has become harder to treat because there are more drug-resistant strains of gonorrhea in many parts of the world and Canada.

## How is gonorrhea spread?

- Gonorrhea is spread through unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex with an infected person.
- A pregnant woman with gonorrhea can pass the infection to the baby during pregnancy or childbirth.

## What are the signs and symptoms of gonorrhea?

- Many persons who are infected with gonorrhea do not know it because they don't have symptoms.
- Symptoms can occur in different parts of the body where the infection is (genitals, throat, rectum).
- Males who have symptoms may have pain or burning when peeing or white, yellow or green discharge from the penis. Sometimes they may have painful or swollen testicles.
- Females who have symptoms may have different vaginal discharge, pain during sex, pain or burning when peeing or pelvic pain.
- Females may have spotting between periods or after sex.
- Infections in the throat do not usually cause symptoms.
- Symptoms of rectal infections may include discharge, anal itching, soreness, bleeding or painful bowel movements.
- Symptoms may appear 2-7 days after contact.

## What are the long-term problems if gonorrhea is not treated?

- In women, the reproductive body parts (fallopian tubes and ovaries) may become infected, which may lead to chronic pelvic pain, tubal pregnancy or infertility (not being able to have a baby).
- Men can have swelling of the urethra and testicles, which can cause infertility.
- The infection may spread to the blood or joints and can be life-threatening.
- People with gonorrhea can get human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) more easily.
- People with HIV can spread it more easily if they are also infected with gonorrhea.
- A pregnant woman can pass the infection to her baby at birth. This can cause blindness, joint infection, or a life-threatening blood infection in the baby.

## How is gonorrhea diagnosed?

- Usually, a urine sample is sent for testing.
- A swab of the urethra, cervix, throat or rectum may also be taken to determine the most appropriate treatment.
- Regular STI testing is recommended for:
  - Sexually active youth <25 years of age with multiple partners
  - Men who have sex with men
  - Those who have had any kind of sex with a person with gonorrhea
  - Sex workers and their sexual partners
  - Street-involved youth
  - Persons with a previous gonorrhea or other STI infection
  - Unprotected sex with someone who normally lives outside of Canada (there is high risk of resistance in this population)
- Talk to your public health nurse, nurse practitioner or doctor about your risk for sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) and how to get tested.

## How is gonorrhea treated?

- Antibiotics can cure gonorrhea;
- However, there are more drug-resistant strains of gonorrhea in many parts of the world and Canada making successful treatment more difficult.
- Antibiotics are provided **free of charge** from a doctor, nurse practitioner, or an STI clinic.
- A combination of antibiotics is required. In some cases, one of these medications is an injection. The combination is the best way to get rid of the infection and prevent further drug resistance from developing.
- Your sexual partner(s) must be tested and treated. You and your partner must abstain from unprotected sex for seven days after both of you have finished antibiotic treatment or you will get the infection again.

## Do I need both medications?

- The treatment of gonorrhea requires both medications.
- Your health care provider can tell you if it is best to get treated now or wait for test results. It can take several days for results to be available.

## Will I need to be re-tested?

- Re-testing is important to make sure the infection is gone and usually should be done 4-5 days after treatment has been completed. It should be done if:
  - Second choice medications were used
  - The infection was in the throat or rectum
  - You are a pregnant woman
  - The infection was caused by a resistant strain of gonorrhea
  - Treatment failure has occurred previously
  - There is a re-exposure to an untreated partner
  - If symptoms continue after treatment

## What will decrease my risk of getting gonorrhea?

- The surest way to prevent all STIs is to abstain from any sexual contact or to have sex with one partner who has been tested for STIs and is not infected (mutually monogamous).
- Use condoms each time you have sex (including oral, anal and vaginal sex).
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have.

**For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner, HealthLine at 811. OR the following sexual health clinics:**

Saskatoon Sexual Health Program  
#100 – 310 Idylwyld Drive North  
SASKATOON, SK S7L 0Z2

*To speak with a nurse Mon-Fri, 9 am -12 pm*  
Phone: 306-655-4642

Regina STD Clinic  
2110 Hamilton Street  
REGINA, SK S4P 2E3  
Phone: 306-766-7788

Prince Albert Parkland Sexual Health Clinic  
101 15<sup>th</sup> Street East  
PRINCE ALBERT, SK S6V 1G1  
Phone: 306-765-6540

Battlefords Sexual Health Clinic  
Rm. 104, 1192 – 101 Street  
NORTH BATTLEFORD, SK S9A 0Z6  
Phone: 306-937-6846

Meadow Lake Sexual Health Services  
218 Centre St.  
MEADOW LAKE, SK S9X 1L6  
Phone: 306-236-5661

*References: Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections, Gonorrhea (July 2013); Gonorrhea, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services; Control of Communicable Diseases Manual (2008); Red Book (2012); British Columbia Center for Disease Control (2014).*