

FACTSHEET: Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted bacterial infection caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. It is treatable and curable.

How is Gonorrhea spread?

Gonorrhea is the second most common bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI) in Canada. It is caused by the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. The highest rates of infections are found in youth/young adults 15-24 years of age. Gonorrhea is spread through unprotected vaginal, anal and oral sex with an infected partner.

What are the symptoms?

Most women and men do not have symptoms. Some people may experience the following symptoms one to ten days after exposure:

- Discharge from vagina or penis
- Painful urination or sex
- Lower abdominal pain
- Abnormal vaginal bleeding
- Testicular pain or swelling
- Rectal pain, discharge or itch

How is Gonorrhea diagnosed?

Testing can be done at a family physician's office, public health unit, walk-in clinic or emergency department.

The test is usually a urine sample but

sometimes a physician may request a swab taken from the infected area (cervix, vagina, urethra, anus and throat).

Ask your health care provider to take a swab while a pap test is being performed.

Is follow-up important?

Repeat testing is recommended after **6 months** of treatment since you may be at increased risk of reinfection. Tests of cure are not necessary if treatment was taken as recommended, symptoms (if any) have resolved, and there has been no re-exposure to an untreated partner.

How is Gonorrhea treated?

Gonorrhea is treated with two specific antibiotics (free at a public health unit) that are prescribed by a doctor. In order to cure Gonorrhea, it is important to take medication as directed. It is also important to avoid unprotected sexual contact (use a condom or dental dam) for 7 days after you and your partner(s) have received treatment.

Treatment is appropriate for people who tested positive for Gonorrhea and people who have had contact with a confirmed case of Gonorrhea.

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Considerations and possible complications

If left untreated, gonorrheal infections can result in:

- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Inflammation of testicles or prostate
- Systemic gonococcal infection
- Infertility
- Reiter's syndrome (rash, sores, joint pain)
- Chronic pelvic pain
- Ectopic pregnancy

How can I reduce my chances of getting and spreading Gonorrhea?

Consider not having sex with a new partner until test results come in. Use condoms or a dental dam every time, even if you are using another form of birth control. Talk to your partner about testing and barriers to using condoms. Do not share sex toys.

If you are under the age of 25, consider getting screened every year.

When should I get tested?

Get tested after your last partner, when starting a new relationship, every year or with a physical exam, or if the condom broke or after having unprotected sex.

Source: Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Ontario Gonorrhea Testing and Treatment Guide. 2nd ed. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2018.

For more information contact:

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