

# GONORRHEA

## What is Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea, also known as the clap or GC, is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD). The infection can affect all parts of the body, but it usually shows up first in the genital area.

## How does it occur?

Gonorrhea is caused by bacteria. It is very contagious. The bacteria can enter the body through any body opening, such as the mouth, vagina, penis, or rectum.

Gonorrhea is most often spread by sexual intercourse. In men, the infection usually starts as an infection of the urethra. (The urethra is the tube that urine passes through.) In women, the bacteria usually first infect the cervix. (The cervix is the opening of the uterus inside the vagina). The bacteria can infect the throat or rectum after oral or anal sex.

A baby can be infected during childbirth if the mother has gonorrhea. When the baby passes through the birth canal, the bacteria can get into and infect the baby's eyes.

## What are the symptoms?

You can have gonorrhea without having any obvious symptoms. When you do have symptoms, they usually appear within 2 to 10 days after you are infected. Symptoms men or women may have are:

- Feeling of burning or pain while urinating
- Urge to urinate often
- Sore throat (after oral sex)

Other symptoms men may have are:

- Cloudy, thick discharge from the penis
- Pain in the scrotum or testicle
- Inflamed anus or rectum (after anal intercourse)

Women may have:

- Cloudy, yellow vaginal discharge, which may have a bad odor
- Stomach pain
- Abnormal menstrual bleeding

If a baby gets gonorrhea during childbirth, one or both of the baby's eyes are severely inflamed.

## How is it diagnosed?

Many illnesses can cause symptoms similar to gonorrhea. To confirm a diagnosis of gonorrhea, the health care provider will test a sample of discharge from the urethra of a man's penis or discharge from a woman's cervix. There is a urine test that can check for gonorrhea, but it is more expensive and not always available.

**How is it treated?**

Gonorrhea is treated with antibiotic medicine, taken by mouth or given as a shot. Many people with gonorrhea also have chlamydia (another sexually transmitted disease). Because of this, you may be given more than one drug to cure both diseases.

**How long will the effects last?**

The effects depend on:

- How long you have had gonorrhea
- How much the infection has spread
- If you have had gonorrhea before

In men, if only the urethra is infected, the gonorrhea will clear up about 2 days after treatment is started. However, even though the symptoms may be gone, you need to take your medicine for the full time prescribed. Without treatment, the urethra may become scarred, and a man may not be able to urinate normally and may become sterile (unable to conceive children).

In women, if only the cervix is infected, the gonorrhea will clear up about 2 days after treatment is started. However, even though the symptoms may be gone, you need to take your medicine for the full time prescribed. Without treatment, the bacteria can spread into the uterus and to the ovaries and fallopian tubes. This can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (infection of the female organs) and sterility. The risk of ectopic (tubal) pregnancy also becomes greater.

If the bacteria get into the bloodstream, multiply, and spread, gonorrhea can lead to arthritis, fever, meningitis, and death.

**How can I take care of myself?**

- Take your medicine for as long as it is prescribed, even if your symptoms are gone before you have finished taking it.
- Make sure you have a follow-up exam with your health care provider 1 to 2 weeks after you start treatment to make sure that all of the gonorrhea bacteria are gone.
- Stop having sexual relations until your provider tells you that all evidence of the disease is gone.

**What can be done to help prevent gonorrhea and its complications?**

- Make sure you tell your sexual partner(s) that they have been exposed to gonorrhea.
- Reduce the risk of infection by always using latex condoms during foreplay and sexual intercourse.
- Even if you don't have symptoms but have had unprotected sex (without a condom), see your local health care provider or clinic to be checked for gonorrhea and other STDs.