

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmissible infection. It often has no symptoms. It is easy to cure, but if left untreated it can cause serious complications. Using condoms prevents infection.

Gonorrhoea

Last updated: 1 July 2012

What is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea (sometimes known as “the clap”) is a sexually transmissible infection caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* bacteria. Gonorrhoea can infect the throat, anus, urethra (urine passage), cervix (neck of the womb) and eyes.

If left untreated, gonorrhoea can cause serious health problems including infections of the skin, joints and the covering of the brain (meningitis). Untreated gonorrhoea in women can lead to a long-lasting infection of the womb and tubes called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and this can cause infertility (inability to get pregnant).

What are the symptoms?

Usually there are no symptoms except in the urethra. People often have gonorrhoea and pass it on to others without knowing it. If symptoms do appear they usually develop 2 to 10 days after infection, and they affect men and women differently:

For **men**, symptoms can include:

- a discharge from the penis
- irritation or pain when urinating
- redness around the opening of the penis
- anal discharge or discomfort
- conjunctivitis and eye inflammation

For **women**, symptoms can include:

- an unusual vaginal discharge
- irregular vaginal bleeding
- pain when urinating
- pelvic pain, especially during sex
- anal discharge or discomfort
- conjunctivitis and eye inflammation

How is it spread?

Gonorrhoea can be transmitted through anal, vaginal or oral sex, even when there are no symptoms. Gonorrhoea can also be passed on to a baby during childbirth.

Who is at risk?

People most at risk of gonorrhoea are men who have unsafe sex with men and males and females who have unsafe heterosexual sex.

If you have symptoms you need to get a sexual health check as soon as possible so that you can be treated, if needed. Even if you don't have symptoms but have been having unsafe sex, it is still important to have a sexual health check from time to time, to find and treat any infections and to prevent spread to other people. People can be infected with several different sexually transmissible infections at the same time. If you're HIV negative, having a sexually transmissible infection can make it easier to also pick up HIV infection. If you're HIV positive, also having another sexually transmissible infection can make you more likely to pass on HIV to sexual partners. More information about sexual health checks can be found at http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/sexualhealth/sex_checkup.asp

How is it prevented?

Using condoms correctly can significantly reduce the risk of transmission of gonorrhoea and other sexually transmissible infections. Always use condoms with new or casual partners.

If you have been diagnosed with gonorrhoea, it's important not to have sex with anyone until after you have been treated and no longer have symptoms.

If you have gonorrhoea you should tell your sexual partner/s. They may also have the infection and telling them allows them to be tested and treated so they don't spread the infection to others. Your doctor can help you decide who may be at risk and help you to contact them either personally or anonymously. The website www.letthemknow.org.au also provides advice and assistance in contacting partners.

If you are treated for gonorrhoea but your sexual partner is not, you could be re-infected.

Do not have sex with anyone who has been diagnosed with gonorrhoea, even using a condom, until after their treatment is completed.

How is it diagnosed?

Gonorrhoea can be diagnosed by your doctor or a sexual health clinic. A urine sample can be used to check for infections in the urethra in men and women. Gonorrhoea is also diagnosed by taking a swab (using a long cotton bud) from any place that may have become infected – the cervix, urethra, anus or throat – and having it tested in a laboratory. .

How is it treated?

These days, gonorrhoea is usually treated with a single dose of antibiotics given by injection.

What is the public health response?

Laboratories are required to notify cases of gonorrhoea to the local public health unit. This information is confidential. Public health staff use this data to better understand who is at risk and help plan activities to prevent new infections in the future. Patients and their doctors should ensure that sexual partners who may have been exposed to gonorrhoea are contacted for assessment, counselling and treatment, if needed.

Further information

The Sexual Health Infoline Freecall 1800 451 624

The Sexual Health Infoline is a NSW Ministry of Health funded information and referral telephone line that is staffed by specialist sexual health nurses from 9:00am to 5:30pm weekdays. The Infoline provides free and confidential sexual health support and information to community members and health professionals.

The following websites can provide further useful information:

- Information about sexually transmissible infections for Aboriginal women and men
<http://www.bettertoknow.org.au>
- Information about sexually transmissible infections for HIV-positive and HIV negative gay men
<http://www.thedramadownunder.info>

For further information please call your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055 or visit the New South Wales Health website www.health.nsw.gov.au