

Infection Prevention and You



Gonorrhea—A sexually transmitted disease with growing resistance

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a common sexually transmitted disease caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. Gonorrhea can cause infections in the mucous membranes of the genitals, rectum, and throat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 820,000 new gonococcal infections occur in the United States each year.

Gonorrhea has progressively developed resistance to nearly every drug used to treat it and has been labeled an urgent public health threat by the CDC.

How does gonorrhea spread?

Gonorrhea can spread during vaginal, anal, or oral sexual contact. Pregnant women with gonorrhea can pass along the infection to their babies during childbirth.

Who is at risk for gonorrhea?

Anyone who is sexually active can get gonorrhea. It is more common among sexually active teens and young adults ages 15-24.

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Most men and women infected with gonorrhea do not show symptoms. And sometimes the symptoms are mistaken for a different infection. If symptoms are present, they could include increased discharge, pain, burning, or sometimes vaginal bleeding.

What are the complications of untreated gonorrhea?

If untreated, gonorrhea can lead to serious complications in males and females. In women, untreated gonorrhea can spread, causing pelvic inflammatory disease. This can lead to infertility and increased risk of ectopic pregnancy. In men, untreated gonorrhea can also lead to infertility. Additionally, the infection can spread to the blood, causing disseminated gonococcal infection (widespread infection throughout the body) and can be life-threatening.



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Is there any treatment for gonorrhea?

Antibiotic resistance is making gonorrhea much harder to treat. Where it once could be treated with a simple course of antibiotics, there is currently only one treatment option available for gonorrhea. According to the CDC, recommended treatment involves a combination of two drugs: an injection of ceftriaxone and an oral dose of azithromycin. It is important to take these medications exactly as instructed by your prescriber. If your symptoms continue for more than a few days after receiving treatment, return to your healthcare provider.

How can I prevent gonorrhea?

To avoid becoming infected with gonorrhea or transmitting it to your sex partner, talk to your partner about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) before the start of a sexual relationship. Using latex condoms correctly can reduce the risk of transmission of gonorrhea. Abstain from sexual contact if you or your partner are exhibiting symptoms or are being treated for an STD. And avoid having multiple sex partners; be in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected.

Additional resources

- The CDC—Gonorrhea <https://www.cdc.gov/std/Gonorrhea/>
- The CDC—Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) www.cdc.gov/STD
- The CDC—Antibiotic-Resistant Gonorrhea <https://www.cdc.gov/std/gonorrhea/arg/default.htm>
- APIC—Ask About Your Medication <http://professionals.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-basics/ask-about-your-medication/>
- APIC—ABCs of Antibiotics <http://professionals.site.apic.org/infographic/abcs-of-antibiotics/>
- APIC—Genital Herpes and Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=genital-herpes-and-other-sexually-transmitted>

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