

Fact Sheet: Gonorrhea

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

What are the symptoms?

Some infected people have no symptoms at all and can unknowingly pass it on to their partners. Most symptoms appear 2-10 days after exposure. Men are more likely to have noticeable symptoms. If left untreated, gonorrhea can cause serious health problems.

Women may experience:

- A burning sensation when urinating
- Yellowish vaginal discharge
- Abdominal pain and/or pain while having sex
- Bleeding between periods
- Fever
- Tender, enlarged cysts in the genital area

Long-term problems in women may be:

- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
- Chronic abdominal pain
- Ectopic (tubal) pregnancy
- Sterility
- Miscarriage, premature deliveries

Men may experience:

- Yellowish-green discharge from the penis
- Burning sensation when urinating
- Swollen or tender glands in the groin area

Long-term problems in men may be:

- Inflammation of the urethra (urethritis)
- Inflammation of the testicles (epididymitis)
- Sterility

If untreated, gonorrhea can spread to other organs and to joints and cause life-threatening problems.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

How is it spread?

Gonorrhea is spread during oral, anal or vaginal sex with someone who is infected. An infected person can also pass the bacteria from genital areas to other areas such as the mouth and eyes. An infected woman can pass gonorrhea to her newborn infant during delivery and if left untreated it can lead to blindness in the child.

How is it treated?

Gonorrhea is treated with a course of antibiotics.

It is very important that you:

- Take all medicines as prescribed even if you start to feel better.
- Inform all sex partners that you have gonorrhea and encourage them to be tested and treated.
- Inform your health care provider if you think that you may be pregnant before taking any medications. Gonorrhea can be safely treated during pregnancy.
- Stop all sexual activity until treatment is completed.

How is it prevented?

- **Don't have sex.** You cannot give or get an STD if there is no contact with the penis, vagina, mouth or anus.
- **If you choose to have sex, be prepared.** Have condoms with a water-based lubricant on hand and use a new one every time you have sex.
- **Limit your number of sexual partners.** The more people you have sex with, the greater the chance of getting an STD.
- **Have regular exams if you are sexually active.** If you think you have an STD, get tested. Your health care provider can test for all STDs, or you can be examined and treated at no charge at the Washtenaw County Adult Clinic. Ask your partner(s) to get tested.
- **Remember, a Pap smear is not a gonorrhea test.** A Pap smear does NOT test for gonorrhea. Ask to be tested if you are at risk.
- **Telling your partner.** Tell anyone you have had sex with that they need to be treated. If they are not treated they can pass it back to you.