

# Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea often has no symptoms and can lead to infertility if left untreated. Though not as common as chlamydia, gonorrhoea is a similar type of infection that is easily passed on through unprotected sex.

Almost 58% of cases in Australia occur between people aged 15-29\*.

Other names for gonorrhoea include 'the Clap' and 'gono'.

## Cause

Gonorrhoea is caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

It can infect the urethra, cervix (entrance to the womb) and rectum in women, and the penis and rectum in men. It can also infect the throat in both men and women.

## Symptoms

Some people with gonorrhoea may have no symptoms.

Women with gonorrhoea may experience:

Unusual vaginal discharge

Pain when urinating

Abdominal pain or pain during vaginal sex

Men with gonorrhoea may experience:

A pus-like discharge from the penis

A burning sensation when urinating

Arthritis (inflammation of the joints) or skin rashes (with severe infections)

Both men and women may experience a sore throat or discharge from the rectum if either of these areas are infected.

## How is it transmitted?

Gonorrhoea is transmitted through an exchange of body fluids (semen, blood and vaginal fluids) during unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sexual activity.

Gonorrhoea can also be spread from a mother with gonorrhoea to her baby at birth, and is a cause of blindness in newborns.

It can't be caught from sharing towels, toilet seats or swimming pools.

## How do I know if I have it?

The only way to know for sure if you have gonorrhoea is to get tested by a doctor. If you have no symptoms, a urine test is usually all that is required, though a vaginal swab is often still recommended for women (you can take this yourself if you feel more comfortable). Where a man has symptoms such as discharge from the penis, swabs are taken of the discharge and possibly from the opening at the end of the penis. **For more information about STI testing go to**

[www.fpwa.org.au/healthinformation/information sheets/stitests/](http://www.fpwa.org.au/healthinformation/information sheets/stitests/)

Your doctor may also test for Chlamydia, as it is often present at the same time as gonorrhoea.

It is important to remember that a Pap smear only tests for changes to the cervix, and not for STIs. It is possible, however, to be tested for STIs at the same time as your Pap smear - talk to your clinician for more details.

## Treatment/Management

Gonorrhoea is treated with a course of antibiotics. A follow-up test is required when all the antibiotics are finished to ensure that the infection has gone. You should avoid sex until after the treatment is complete. All sexual partners are treated at the same time, as reinfection from untreated partners is quite common.

## Why is treatment important?

If gonorrhoea is left untreated it can lead to infertility in both men and women, and can sometimes cause infections in joints and skin.

For women, the most serious danger from gonorrhoea is that it can spread into the fallopian tubes and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (blocked tubes)

In men, inflammation of the epididymis (the thin tube leading from the testes to the vas deferens where the sperm mature) may develop, causing it to become painful and swollen. This can lead to infertility if left untreated.

Having gonorrhoea also increases your chances of contracting other infections, such as HIV.

## Prevention

Using condoms and dams reduces the risk of contracting gonorrhoea (a dam is a thin latex square held over the vaginal or anal area during oral sex), as they stop body fluids like semen, blood and vaginal fluids from being exchanged. **For more information about condoms and dams go to [www.fpwa.org.au/healthinformation/information sheets/](http://www.fpwa.org.au/healthinformation/information sheets/)**

Many people with gonorrhoea don't have any symptoms and are therefore unaware of the risk of passing it on. If you've had unprotected sex in the past, get tested by a doctor or at FPWA.

*\*2005 Annual Surveillance Report: HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis and Sexually Transmissible Infections in Australia*

**For more information about gonorrhoea contact the Sexual Health Helpline on 9227 6178 or 1800 198 205 (country callers) or email [sexhelp@fpwa.org.au](mailto:sexhelp@fpwa.org.au)**

**Practising safe sex reduces the risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs).**



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