



**[The Lambda Clinic - Sexual Health Advice - Patient Information Leaflet](http://www.lambdaclinic.co.uk/gonorrhoea.html)**  
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## **Gonorrhoea**

### **What is gonorrhoea?**

Gonorrhoea is caused by a bacterium called the gonococcus. The bacterium is found in the cervix (entrance to the womb), the urethra (tube where urine comes out), the rectum (the back passage), the throat and occasionally the eyes.

### **How do you get gonorrhoea?**

Gonorrhoea can be transmitted between people during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Using a condom correctly will reduce your chance of getting and passing on gonorrhoea.

Transfer of gonorrhoea infection from the genital areas to the eyes by fingers can occur and it is also possible for a pregnant woman to pass the infection to her baby's eyes (conjunctivitis) during childbirth.

You cannot get gonorrhoea from kissing, sharing cups or plates, hugging, sharing towels or from swimming pools.

### **Common symptoms of gonorrhoea?**

About 1 in 10 of infected men and 1 in 2 of infected women have no symptoms at all. Symptoms can show up 1 – 14 days after being infected with gonorrhoea. Sometimes it can be many months later or not until the infection spreads to other parts of the body. If you do get symptoms, they may include:

#### *Women*

- An unusual vaginal discharge – may be thin or watery, yellow or green
- Pain when passing urine
- Pain in lower abdomen (due to pelvic inflammatory disease)

#### *Men*

- Infection of the urethra (urethritis) causing:
- white, yellow or green discharge from the penis
- pain or burning when passing urine
- wanting to pass urine more often
- soreness inside the penis
- redness at the opening of the urethra at the tip of the penis
- pain in or both testes



### *Both Men and Women*

- Infection in the rectum - may have no symptoms, or may cause irritation, itch and discharge from the anus.
- Infection in the throat - usually no symptoms, but may cause a sore throat.
- Infection in the eyes - pain, swelling, irritation and discharge (conjunctivitis).

### **How is gonorrhoea diagnosed?**

It is possible to do a gonorrhoea test within a few days of having sex. However, if you have no symptoms it is often advised to wait up to 2 weeks after having sex.

There are different ways of testing for gonorrhoea:

#### *Women*

- Swab to test for gonorrhoea from the cervix during an internal examination.
- Swab to test for gonorrhoea from inside the vagina. This may be done by yourself or by the doctor.

#### *Men*

A urine sample. You will be advised not to pass urine for 1 – 2 hours before the gonorrhoea test is done.

#### *Men and women*

- A gonorrhoea swab taken from the urethra
- A swab for gonorrhoea taken from your rectum if you have anal sex
- A swab for gonorrhoea taken from your throat if you have oral sex
- A swab for gonorrhoea from discharge from your eyes if you have symptoms of conjunctivitis

### **What is the treatment for gonorrhoea?**

Either a single dose of antibiotic tablets or one antibiotic injection.

If complications have occurred, other treatment may also be needed.

Some antibiotics used to treat gonorrhoea may interact with the contraceptive pill. If you are taking this you should tell the doctor or nurse so they can advise you what to do. Antibiotic treatment is at least 95% effective. Some infections particularly those caught abroad are resistant, so tell the doctor if you think you or your partner could have caught gonorrhoea whilst abroad.

### **Does my partner need to be treated for gonorrhoea infection?**

- Yes, your current sexual partner and any other sexual partners within the past three months.
- They should be tested for infection, even if they do not have any symptoms
- A course of antibiotics is usually advised for sexual partners, even if the tests are negative
- If you have not had sex within the last three months then your latest partner should be tested and treated



- It is important that you avoid vaginal, anal or oral sex until both you and your partner have finished the treatments prescribed (or after 7 days with the 'single dose'). Using a condom will reduce this risk but it does not guarantee it. This is to prevent you re-infecting each other.
- We strongly advise you to tell your partner(s), but it is not compulsory if this is difficult.

The **Lambda Clinic** can give you a contact slip to send to your partners. With permission the **Lambda clinic** can do this for you. This slip explains to the person they may have been exposed to a sexually transmitted infection and suggest they go for a check up. It does not say what the infection is, or have your name on it. This protects your confidentiality. This is called partner notification.

### **Can gonorrhoea disappear without treatment?**

Symptoms can clear without treatment. This can take anywhere between a couple of weeks to 6 months. The absence of symptoms however does not mean the infection has gone. It is still possible to pass the infection on to someone else.

Without treatment the infection can spread to other parts of the body causing serious long term complications. In women gonorrhoea can spread to other reproductive organs causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). This can lead to long term pelvic pain, blocked fallopian tubes, ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the womb) and infertility.

In men it can lead to inflamed testicles, inflamed prostate and infertility.

### **How do I know for how long I have had gonorrhoea infection for?**

It is often impossible to know how long you have had gonorrhoea for particularly if you do not get any symptoms or they appear a long time after you have been exposed. You might never know whether you got gonorrhoea from your current partner or a previous sexual partner. These doubts are often difficult to deal with, so do not be afraid to talk to the clinic staff about how you feel.

### **Follow up for gonorrhoea**

No follow up is arranged if your symptoms have gone. If symptoms persist you may need re-testing and a second dose / course of antibiotics.

### **What happens if I get gonorrhoea whilst I am pregnant?**

Gonorrhoea can be passed to the baby during childbirth. This can cause inflammation and discharge in the baby's eyes (conjunctivitis). Gonorrhoea can be treated with antibiotics when you are pregnant or breast feeding – these will not harm the baby.

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