

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## Gonorrhea



### Burlington County Health Department

Raphael Meadow Health Center  
15 Pioneer Boulevard  
P.O. Box 6000  
Westampton, N.J. 08060  
Phone: 609-265-5548 Fax: 609-265-3152



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
Burlington County Health Department  
*Health Starts Here*

### What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD). It is caused by bacteria that can grow and multiply in the genitals, rectum, and throat. It is a very common infection, especially among people ages 15-24 years.

### How is gonorrhea spread?

Gonorrhea is spread from having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has gonorrhea. A pregnant woman with gonorrhea can give the infection to her baby during childbirth.

### What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

The early symptoms of gonorrhea are often mild. In women, most have no symptoms. However, gonorrhea symptoms are often mistaken for a bladder infection. Even if women have no symptoms, they are at risk of developing serious complications if the disease is untreated.

Symptoms in women can include:

- Painful or burning sensation when urinating
- Increased vaginal discharge
- Vaginal bleeding between periods

Men have symptoms more often than women, including:

- White, yellow, or green discharge from the penis
- Painful or swollen testicles (this is less common)
- Burning sensation when urinating

Rectal infections in both men and women may include:

- Discharge
- Anal itching
- Soreness
- Bleeding
- Painful bowel movements

### How is gonorrhea diagnosed?

Gonorrhea must be diagnosed by a doctor or health care professional. Most of the time, urine can be used to test for gonorrhea. However, if you had oral or anal sex, swabs may be used to collect samples from your throat/rectum for lab testing.

## **How is gonorrhea treated?**

Gonorrhea can be treated with antibiotics. It is extremely important that all medications are taken as prescribed as antibiotic-resistant gonorrhea strains are increasing. This means it is getting more difficult to treat gonorrhea with the medications we have.

## **What happens if gonorrhea is not treated?**

In women, the most common result gonorrhea not being treated is Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), a serious infection of the female reproductive tract. PID causes scar tissue to form in the fallopian tube, which can cause women to become infertile (unable to become pregnant). Ectopic pregnancy (when the baby grows outside of the womb) is another possible complication.

In men, gonorrhea can cause pain in the tubes attached to the testicles. In rare cases, it may permanently prevent a man from being able to father a child. Rarely, untreated gonorrhea can travel to the blood and joints, which can be life-threatening.

## **Can gonorrhea affect a newborn baby?**

If a pregnant woman has gonorrhea, she may give the infection to her baby during delivery. This can cause blindness, joint infection, or a life-threatening blood infection in the baby. Treatment of gonorrhea as soon as it is detected in pregnant women will reduce the risk of passing it to the baby. Pregnant women should talk to their doctor to get proper checkups, testing, and treatment, if necessary.

## **Can gonorrhea be prevented?**

The best way to avoid gonorrhea and other STDs is to not have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

Latex condoms, when used regularly and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of gonorrhea.

Any genital symptoms such as discharge or burning during urination or unusual sore or rash should be a signal to stop having sex and see a doctor immediately. If a person has been treated for gonorrhea (or any other STD), he or she should notify all recent sex partners so they can see a health care provider and be treated. This will reduce the risk that the sex partners will develop serious complications from gonorrhea and will also reduce the person's risk of becoming re-infected. The person and all of his or her sex partners must avoid sex until they have completed their treatment for gonorrhea.

## **Where can I get more information?**

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/gonorrhea>
- The Burlington County Department of Health at (609) 265-5533
- The New Jersey Department of Health(NJDOH) at 1-800-624-2377 or on the NJDOD Website at <http://www.nj.gov/health/>