

Gonorrhea

*Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacteria *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. This infection can occur in the penis or external genitals, vagina or internal genitals, anus, and eye. The bacteria can also be found in body fluids such as semen, pre-ejaculate, vaginal fluids, and anal fluids.*

Gonorrhea can be cured with antibiotics. It is a common STI in British Columbia.

Causes

Gonorrhea is passed through vaginal, oral, and anal sexual contact. This includes both penetrative sex and sexual activities where there is an exchange of body fluids. You can also get gonorrhea by sharing sex toys. Once you have this infection, you can pass it to others even if you don't have symptoms.

Symptoms

If you have gonorrhea, it is common to not notice any symptoms. If you do get symptoms, they will most likely show up between 2 to 7 days. Your symptoms will depend on where the infection is located, but occur most often in the penis/external genitals. The most common symptoms include:

- **Penis/external genitals:** You may notice abnormal discharge and an unusual, painful, or itchy sensation. You may also have pain or trouble when urinating. If you have testicles you may experience pain and sometimes a little swelling in the area.
- **Vagina/internal genitals:** You may notice abnormal discharge and bleeding. Other symptoms may include lower abdominal pain and sometimes pain during sex.
- **Anus:** You may notice abnormal discharge. You can also have generalized pain in the area.
- **Throat:** It is rare to have symptoms, but you might experience a sore throat.
- **Eye:** You may notice swelling or abnormal discharge.

**Note: If you have had lower surgery, your genital symptoms may vary.*

Tests and Diagnosis

There are choices for how you test for gonorrhea. A health care provider will recommend certain tests depending on the types of sex that you're having. Testing is usually done with a urine sample or a swab of the throat, rectum or vagina.

It is best to get tested for gonorrhea if you:

- have symptoms
- have a sexual partner who has tested positive for gonorrhea
- are doing routine screening for STIs
- are pregnant
- are going to have an IUD inserted, a surgical abortion, or a gynecological procedure

Window Period (how long to wait before testing):

Most test results are accurate 7 days after you come in contact with gonorrhea. In British Columbia, most test results should be ready in 10 days.

Treatment

Gonorrhea is treated with prescription antibiotics. It is important to take all your medications as directed. If you miss any doses, the infection may not be cured. See your health care provider if this happens or if you still have symptoms after you finish your treatment.

It is important to not have sex (even with a condom) for 7 days after the start of your treatment. If you do have sex during this time, you could pass gonorrhea to your sexual partners or get it again. If this happens, talk to your health care provider.

The medications used to treat gonorrhea are available for free in BC. Talk to your health care provider to see if they have them in stock.

Sexual Partners

Your sexual partners within the last two months should be tested and treated for gonorrhea. If you haven't had sex in the last two months your last partner should be tested and treated.

There are a few ways to tell partners. You can tell partners yourself or anonymously. Talk to your health care provider about what is right for you.

Complications

If you treat gonorrhea early, there are usually no other health problems. If left untreated, it can lead to serious complications including:

- higher chance of getting and passing HIV
- pelvic inflammatory disease
- epididymitis
- infertility
- ectopic pregnancy
- chronic pelvic pain

- reactive arthritis
- disseminated gonococcal infection

Pregnancy: If you are pregnant you should be screened for gonorrhoea. You can pass gonorrhoea to your child during birth.

Prevention

It is a good idea to be tested regularly for STIs, especially if you have new sexual partners or open relationships. Talking with partners about safer sex makes sure everyone knows what to expect. Condoms are great if they work for you – the correct use of condoms reduces your chances of getting and passing gonorrhoea.

Resources

HealthLink BC – Information about gonorrhoea in multiple languages
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/gonorrhoea>

SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about gonorrhoea
<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information
<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>