

**BASIC INFORMATION****DESCRIPTION**

Gonorrhea is an infectious disease of the reproductive organs that is sexually transmitted (venereal disease). In females, the cervix usually is the initial site of infection. The disease can spread and infect the uterus (womb) and fallopian tubes, resulting in pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). In males, it involves the urethra; and in both sexes the rectum, throat, joints and eyes (sometimes). It can affect all ages (even young children) who have sexual contact with infected persons. An infected woman can pass it to her newborn infant during delivery, causing eye infections in the baby. The peak incidence is between ages 20 and 30. Incubation period is from 2 to 10 days.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Females often have few or no symptoms. Males usually have more pronounced symptoms.
- Burning on urination.
- Thick green-yellow discharge from the penis or vagina.
- Pain or tenderness with sexual intercourse (sometimes).
- Rectal discomfort and discharge (sometimes).
- Joint pain.
- Rash, especially on palms.
- Mild sore throat (sometimes).

CAUSES

Infection from bacteria, *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, that grow well on delicate, moist tissue. The bacteria are usually transmitted sexually, but some cases are of unknown origin. Sexual activity involving the rectum or mouth may transmit infection to those areas if either partner is infected.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Multiple sexual partners, whether heterosexual or homosexual.
- Prostitution.
- Child sexual abuse.
- Passage of newborn through the infected birth canal of the mother.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid sexual partners whose health practices and status are uncertain.
- Use a latex condom during sexual intercourse.
- Obstetric providers usually recommend that a pregnant woman have at least one test for gonorrhea.
- This condition must be reported to the local health department to prevent its spread. It sometimes occurs simultaneously with syphilis and chlamydia. Your cooperation is important, and your confidentiality will be maintained.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Usually curable in 1 to 2 weeks with treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Gonococcal eye infection. This may cause blindness in children.
- Blood poisoning (gonococcal septicemia).
- Infectious arthritis.
- Pelvic inflammatory disease.
- Endocarditis.
- Sexual impotence in men, if untreated.
- Ectopic (tubal) pregnancy.
- Infertility in women.

**TREATMENT****GENERAL MEASURES**

- Diagnostic tests may include blood studies; laboratory culture and microscopic analysis of the discharge from the reproductive organs, rectum or throat.
- Treatment is with antibiotic medication. Follow up laboratory cultures will confirm cure.
- Patients should be tested for other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Use separate linens and disposable eating utensils during treatment.
- Wash hands frequently especially after urination and bowel movements. Don't touch eyes with hands.
- Inform all of your sexual contacts so that they can seek treatment.
- Additional information available from the Sexually Transmitted Diseases Hotline 800-227-8922; website www.ashstd.org

MEDICATION

- Antibiotics to fight the infection will be prescribed.
- You may take nonprescription drugs, such as acetaminophen or aspirin, to reduce discomfort but not in place of antibiotics. Home remedies or folk-medicine treatments are ineffective.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions, except don't resume sexual activity until a follow-up culture shows the infection is cured. Treatment failures and resistance to antibiotics can occur.

DIET

No special diet. Reduce consumption of caffeine and alcohol during treatment. These irritate the urethra.

**NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF**

- You or a family member has symptoms of gonorrhea.
- Chills, fever, abdominal pain, genital sores or joint pain occur either before or during treatment.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.