

GONORRHEA

Each year, about two million people in the United States contract gonorrhea. The disease is caused by bacteria, neisseria gonorrhoeae, usually transmitted through sexual intimacy such as oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse. In its early stages, gonorrhea often exhibits no symptoms. A woman's first clue may very well be her partner's penile discharge, burning, or frequency of urination.

Symptoms

Many cases of gonorrhea among women are detected by a routine gonorrhea culture during an annual pelvic exam. When symptoms do occur, they can include:

- Unusual vaginal discharge
- Painful urination
- Painful intercourse
- Pelvic pain or tenderness
- Unusual vaginal bleeding
- Bleeding after intercourse
- Fever

Gonorrhea most often attacks the reproductive tract, but can attack the throat, eyes and rectum as well

What Does Gonorrhea Cause?

For women, genital gonorrhea can cause:

- Cervicitis, an inflammation and infection of the cervix
- Acute pelvic infection, Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), which increases the likelihood of infertility or ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy implanted in the fallopian tube).

For men, genital gonorrhea can cause:

- Urethritis, an inflammation of the urinary tube making urination difficult
- Epididymitis, an inflammation of the testicles which can result in sterility.

Gonorrheal bacteria may also infect other areas of the body. In infants, pneumonia and eye infections such as conjunctivitis are possible. Eye infections also occur in adults; sore throats and proctitis, an infection of the rectum are other possible conditions.

These conditions may seem quite alarming, but are easily preventable and curable.

How Can I Keep From Getting Gonorrhea

- Abstinence, i.e., not having intercourse, virtually eliminates the risk of being infected with gonorrhea.
- Consistent condom use (every time, start to finish) during vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse provides significant protection from gonorrhea as well as other sexually transmitted diseases (STD). The female condom provides an alternative when the male condom is not an option. A latex barrier (sometimes called a dental dam), can also be used during mouth to genital or mouth to anal contact for STD protection.
- Limiting the number of sexual partners you have in your lifetime decreases the likelihood of STD exposure.

Recognize that you can make these choices to stay healthier and reduce your risk for STDs.

How Do I Know If I Am At Risk For Having Gonorrhea?

Answer these questions:

I have had vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse without a condom.

Yes No

I have had more than one sexual partner in my life.

My partner has had other partners.

I am experiencing symptoms described in this flyer.

Answering yes to any two of the above may indicate the need for gonorrhea testing. If you think you are at risk, ask your clinician for a gonorrhea test, and discuss the need for STD testing as well.

For women, gonorrhea testing is done during a gynecological exam. A sample of cells will be taken from the cervix with a cotton swab and will then be cultured.

Testing for men is done by a urine test or by swabbing the lower end of the urethra (urinary tube) for a sample of cells. For men and women at risk for oral or anal gonorrhea, a sample will be taken from the mouth or rectum.

What Happens If I Have Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is curable. Antibiotics will effectively kill the gonorrhea bacteria if taken correctly and completely. Treatment is taken orally for one or two weeks as prescribed by your clinician. A repeat gonorrhea test may be advised after treatment is completed. Once treated, gonorrhea will only recur if you are re-infected. For this reason, all sexual partners must be treated as well, and you should not have unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse until all involved have completed treatment.

For more information on gonorrhea and other STIs, call or visit HealthWorks in rooms 19 and 20 in Ritenour Building or call 863-2500. Sexual health educators are available to provide information on sexuality topics as well as to discuss sexual health concerns or issues individually. All conversations are completely confidential.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

Appointments

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at www.sa.psu.edu/uhs

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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