

## What is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is a bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI). It is spread through vaginal, anal or oral sex, or by the fingers and hands from the genitals to the eyes. It is less common in the general community than other STIs such as chlamydia.

Gonorrhea can infect the throat, bottom (rectum or anus), genitals (such as urethra and cervix) and eyes. Gonorrhoea can be treated with antibiotics. Gonorrhea can sometimes spread to the uterus (womb) and fallopian tubes causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). If untreated, it can also cause infertility.

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## How do you get gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is spread by having sex with someone who is infected. Gonorrhea often doesn't cause symptoms, so you might not know if a partner has it.

You cannot get gonorrhoea from toilets, swimming pools, spas or non-sexual contact (a hug or handshake) with others. Gonorrhoea can also be spread from a mother to the baby during childbirth.

## How can I protect myself from gonorrhoea?

The best way to prevent getting gonorrhoea and other STIs is to have safer sex:

- use a condom or dental dam every time you have sex (including vaginal, oral or anal sex)
- don't have sex with someone who knows they have gonorrhoea, even with a condom or dental dam, until after they have completed their treatment
- have regular testing if you are at risk of STIs
- when sharing sex toys, wash the toy or put a new condom on it before another person uses it

## What are the symptoms of gonorrhoea?

Symptoms may appear 3-5 days after contact with the infection. When present, symptoms may include:

- pain when passing urine
- a discharge from the penis
- pain in the testes (balls)
- redness around the opening of the penis
- anal discharge or discomfort
- an unusual vaginal discharge
- pelvic pain
- pain during sex
- irregular bleeding – bleeding in between periods or bleeding after sex
- anal discharge or discomfort

If gonorrhoea has infected the throat there are generally few symptoms. In some rare cases, gonorrhoea may cause other symptoms such as joint pain and swelling, and conjunctivitis (eye inflammation).

## How do I get tested for gonorrhoea?

A urine sample can be tested for gonorrhoea. You will be asked to collect the first part of your urine stream (pee) into a jar. It is best if you have not passed urine for 20 minutes before the sample is collected.

Alternatively, swabs can be collected from the opening of the penis (only if there is a discharge present), vagina or cervix.

A swab can be self-collected from the vagina even without symptoms. Your doctor or nurse will show you how to do this. Otherwise, the swab can be collected by the doctor or nurse during an examination.

A swab from the anus and/or throat may also be taken if there has been anal or oral sex, or if you are a man who has sex with men. These tests are not painful.



## How is gonorrhoea treated?

Gonorrhoea is usually treated with an antibiotic injection and antibiotic tablet. An additional swab may be collected before you take the antibiotics to check that they will be effective. Sometimes a longer course of antibiotics is needed if you have a condition such as pelvic inflammatory disease.

Your doctor may also recommend treatment for chlamydia at the same time – if a person has gonorrhoea it is common for them to have chlamydia as well. Chlamydia is treated with antibiotic tablets.

Some strains of gonorrhoea are resistant to treatment with usual antibiotics. This is becoming increasingly common in Australia. If it was not tested for initially, an additional urine or swab may be collected to test for antibiotic sensitivity before you start treatment.

If drug-resistance is detected, your doctor or nurse will contact you to discuss other treatment options.

You will be advised to have no sex at all, even if using a condom, until 7 days after your antibiotic treatment and any symptoms have resolved. Your partner(s) need treatment too, and you should avoid sexual contact with recent partners until they have been tested and treated. It is recommended that you have a follow-up test 2 weeks later.

It is not uncommon to get gonorrhoea again, so you should have another test 3 months after treatment.

## Do I need to tell my sexual partners?

If you have gonorrhoea, your doctor or nurse will tell you who should be contacted and treated. They can also help you notify your partners.

It's important to let your sexual partners know so they can get tested and treated too. This can be done privately, and there are websites where you can send a free anonymous text or email – just ask your doctor or nurse about it.

## For more information

- Visit your nearest Family Planning Australia clinic [fpnsw.org.au/clinics](https://fpnsw.org.au/clinics)
- Chat to a nurse via Talkline – 1300 658 886 or [fpnsw.org.au/talkline](https://fpnsw.org.au/talkline)
- National Relay Service (for people who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing or have speech communication difficulties) – 133 677
- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) – 131 450
- NSW Sexual Health Infolink – [www.shil.nsw.gov.au](https://www.shil.nsw.gov.au) or 1800 451 624
- Let Them Know – [www.letthemknow.org.au](https://www.letthemknow.org.au)