

# Gonorrhea

## What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea (gon-or-REE-uh) is a sexually transmitted infection, or STI. It can affect the penis, vagina, throat, or rectal area. Rarely, if it is not treated, it can spread to other places like the blood, joints, skin, heart, and brain.

## Who gets it?

Anyone who has sex with a person who has gonorrhea can get it. It can spread through oral, vaginal, or anal sex. You are more likely to get it if you have sex without a condom or have more than one sex partner. Babies can get it during birth.

## How do I know if I have it?

You might have pain when you pee or in your rectum. You could have discharge from your penis or vagina, or see blood in your poop. People with a vagina usually do not have symptoms unless the infection is bad. Infections in the throat can cause a sore throat. If you notice symptoms, please see your doctor.

Testing is the best way to know for sure if you have gonorrhea. You or your doctor will collect a sample of your urine or a swab from your throat, vagina, cervix, penis, or rectum.

People with a cervix who are younger than 25 years or older people with a cervix who have a new sex partner or multiple sex partners should be tested

yearly. Men who have sex with men should be tested at least once a year and may need more frequent testing.

## How can I lower my risk of getting it?

Not having sex is the best way to avoid gonorrhea and other STIs. If you have sex, use condoms to lower your risk. You should get tested if you have had sex without a condom. If you have an STI, don't have sex until you and your partner have been treated. You can get it again if your partner is not treated.

## How is it treated?

You will probably get a shot of an antibiotic. If you have a bad infection, you may need to stay in the hospital to get medicine delivered through a needle in your arm. You should also be tested for chlamydia, syphilis, and HIV.

## Where can I get more information?

AAFP's Patient Information Resource  
<https://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/sexually-transmitted-infections.html>

American Sexual Health Association  
<https://www.ashsexualhealth.org/gonorrhea/>

U.S. National Library of Medicine's Medline Plus  
<https://medlineplus.gov/gonorrhea.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/std/gonorrhea/default.htm>

April 2022



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Adapted with permission from Mayor MT, Roett MA, Uduhiri KA. Diagnosis and management of gonococcal infections [published correction appears in *Am Fam Physician*. 2013;87(3):163]. *Am Fam Physician*. 2012;86(10):931-938. Accessed September 22, 2021. <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2012/1115/p931.html>

**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <https://familydoctor.org>.**

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2022 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.