

ABOUT GONORRHEA



What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) that affects people of all genders and ages. Having an STI does not define you—getting tested and treated is simply part of taking care of your overall health.

How does gonorrhea spread?

- Gonorrhea is passed through vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the infection.
- It can spread even without full penetration, through close genital contact.
- People can have gonorrhea without knowing it—many do not notice symptoms.
- Gonorrhea can infect different body parts: vaginal area, penis, anus, throat, or eyes.
- Untreated or improperly treated gonorrhea infections can progress to a more serious condition in which the bacteria enter the bloodstream and cause a severe illness, called Disseminated Gonococcal Infection (DGI).

Get tested

- Testing is simple—usually a urine test or/and a vaginal swab, a swab from rectum, or/and throat.
- Regular screening is recommended, especially for sexually active people under age 25 or anyone with new or multiple partners.
- Be open with your healthcare provider about your sexual activities so they can test all relevant areas.

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Signs and symptoms

Most people don't have symptoms, which is why regular testing is important. When they do appear, they usually show up 1–14 days after exposure.

If you have a vagina, look for:

- Thick yellow or gray vaginal discharge
- Burning or pain during urination or bowel movements
- Bleeding between periods or after sex
- Cramps or pain in the lower abdomen

If you have a penis, look for:

- Thick yellow or greenish discharge from the penis
- Burning or pain during urination or bowel movements
- Needing to urinate more often
- Swollen or tender testicles

All genders, look for:

- Anal pain, discharge, or bleeding
- Sore throat (if infection is in the throat)
- Eye pain or discharge (rare)

Why treatment matters

Without treatment, gonorrhea can cause:

- Long-term pelvic pain
- Fertility issues in all genders
- Complications during pregnancy or passing the infection to a baby during birth
- Damage to reproductive organs
- Heart trouble, skin disease, arthritis
- Increased risk of acquiring or transmitting other STIs, including HIV

Having an STI does not define you.

Getting tested and treated are a normal part of health care.

Get treated

- Gonorrhea is treated with antibiotics prescribed by a healthcare provider.
- It's important to complete all medications as instructed.
- Sexual partners should also be tested and treated to prevent reinfection.

Antibiotic-resistant gonorrhea

While gonorrhea is currently treatable with recommended antibiotics, gonorrhea has a long history of acquiring resistance to antibiotics. Resistance to the current class of antibiotics used to treat gonorrhea is increasing globally. Resistant gonorrhea remains rare in the United States, but it is important to get back in touch with your doctor if your symptoms do not resolve or get worse after receiving treatment for gonorrhea. Your doctor can perform a test of cure and connect you with care if the infection has not been successfully cleared.

Protect yourself and others

- Use condoms or dental dams during vaginal, anal, and oral sex.
- Get tested regularly and encourage partners to do the same.
- Getting tested again 1–2 weeks after treatment can help ensure that your infection has been cured and that you do not have an antibiotic-resistant infection or one that could progress to DGI.
- Talk openly with partners and your doctor about STI prevention—it's part of healthy communication.
- Ask your doctor about additional protection and prevention options, such as expedited partner therapy (EPT), Doxy-PEP, PrEP, or nPEP, which can help reduce the risk of some infections, including HIV.
- Avoid sexual contact until you and your partner(s) have completed treatment.

Follow-up for reportable STIs

Most STI infections, including gonorrhea, are reportable infections. This means it's likely that health department staff will reach out to you if your test results are positive. They do this to:

- Ensure you've been treated appropriately
- Provide you with complete information
- Collect a brief sexual history and possible exposure timeline
- Help stop the spread of infection in the community

Your personal information is protected under HIPAA regulations, and everything you share is completely confidential.