

# Gonorrhoea symptoms & treatment



## FAST FACTS

- Gonorrhoea is mainly found in discharge from the penis and in vaginal fluid.
- It's a [sexually transmitted infection \(STI\)](#) that can be passed on through sex without a condom or sharing sex toys with someone who has gonorrhoea (even if they don't have symptoms).
- Gonorrhoea can be prevented by using [male](#) and [female condoms](#), dental dams and latex gloves.
- A simple urine (pee) test or a swab taken by a healthcare professional will show whether or not you have gonorrhoea.
- Gonorrhoea can be treated and cured with antibiotics.

*If you have had sex without a condom, or you are worried about gonorrhoea or other STIs, get tested as soon as possible - even if you don't have any symptoms.*

## What is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is caused by bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* or gonococcus. It used to be known as 'the clap'.

## How serious is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea can be easily treated and cured. If left untreated, gonorrhoea can cause infertility

(inability to get pregnant) and other health conditions.

Gonorrhoea can be passed from mother to child during birth. Gonorrhoea can be more dangerous in babies, it can cause eye infections such as conjunctivitis, which in serious cases can lead to blindness in the baby.

## How do you get gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea can be passed on very easily and you can get it from:

- [vaginal](#), [anal](#) or [oral sex](#) without a [condom](#) or dental dam, with someone who has gonorrhoea (even if they don't have symptoms)
- sharing sex toys without washing them and covering with a new condom each time they are used
- close genital contact – this means you can get gonorrhoea from someone if your genitals touch, even if there is no penetration, orgasm or ejaculation

It's also possible to have a gonorrhoea infection in your eye, if your eye comes into contact with semen or vaginal fluids from someone with the infection. This, however, is rare.

Pregnant women with gonorrhoea can pass the infection on to their babies at birth.

## Gonorrhoea, HIV and sexual health

- Having an STI, including gonorrhoea, increases your risk of getting [HIV](#).
- If someone living with HIV also has gonorrhoea, their viral load will increase, which will make them more likely to pass on HIV if they have [sex without a condom](#), even if they are taking HIV drugs ([antiretrovirals](#)).
- However, if you have an [undetectable viral load](#) (because you're taking antiretrovirals) there is no evidence that gonorrhoea makes you more likely to pass on HIV.
- If you are taking [antiretrovirals](#) it is important to discuss with your doctor how treatment for gonorrhoea may interact with your HIV drugs.

If you are worried about HIV infection, find out everything you need to know in our [HIV Transmission and Prevention](#) section.

## How do you protect yourself against gonorrhoea?

- Use a new [male](#) or [female condom](#) or dental dam every time you have [vaginal](#), [anal](#) or [oral sex](#).
- Use a new dental dam or latex gloves for [rimming and fingering](#) (exploring your partner's anus with your fingers, mouth or tongue) or use latex gloves for fisting.
- Cover sex toys with a new condom and wash them after use.
- Having multiple sexual partners can also increase your risk of getting gonorrhoea. If you are having sex with multiple partners, it's even more important to use condoms and have regular STI tests

*Note condoms are the best protection against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. Taking PrEP doesn't prevent gonorrhoea or pregnancy.*

Ask your doctor or healthcare worker, if you'd like more advice.

## What do gonorrhoea symptoms look like?

Many people with gonorrhoea don't have any symptoms. If you do get symptoms, you will normally notice them within 10 days of infection, but they can occur many months later. You can also get gonorrhoea in your anus (bottom), throat or eyes.

Symptoms for women include:

- unusual discharge from the vagina that is thick and green or yellow in colour
- pain or burning when urinating (peeing)
- pain in the lower abdomen
- bleeding between periods and/or heavier periods
- bleeding after sex - this is rare.

Symptoms for men include:

- unusual discharge from the penis that may be white, yellow or green in colour
- pain or burning when urinating (peeing)
- inflammation or swelling of the foreskin
- pain in the testicles - this is rare.

Symptoms for women and men:

- inflammation (redness) of the eye (called conjunctivitis) caused by infected semen (cum) or vaginal fluid getting into the eyes.

## Can I get tested for gonorrhoea?

Yes - for women, a healthcare professional may take a swab from either the lower part of the womb (cervix) or the vagina. For men, either a urine (pee) sample or a swab is taken from the tip of the penis (urethra). If you have had anal or oral sex, you may have a swab taken from the anus (bottom) or throat.

If you have gonorrhoea you should be tested for other STIs. It is important that you tell your recent sexual partner/s so they can also get tested and treated. Many people who have gonorrhoea do not notice anything wrong, and by telling them you can help to stop the infection being passed on. It can also stop you from getting gonorrhoea again.

## How is gonorrhoea treated?

Gonorrhoea is treated with a short course of antibiotics.

Whether you have symptoms or not, don't have sex again until you and your current sexual partner have finished your treatment and a healthcare professional says you can.

You can get gonorrhoea even if you've had it before. Treatment cures the current infection but does not make you immune - this means you can get infected again.

### Complications of gonorrhoea?

- As with most STIs, gonorrhoea puts you at risk of other STIs, including [HIV](#).
- In pregnant woman, gonorrhoea can cause miscarriage and premature labour. The mother can pass it on to her unborn baby. The baby could be born with conjunctivitis, blindness or be at increased risk of pneumonia.
- Untreated gonorrhoea can lead to other health problems.

In women it can cause:

Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) - infection of the uterus, ovaries and fallopian tubes that causes pelvic pain and fever. PID can be treated with antibiotics, but left untreated it can lead to long-term pelvic pain, inability to get pregnant and even ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus), which can be very dangerous.

In men untreated gonorrhoea can cause:

Epididymitis - infection of the tubes that carry sperm to the testicles, which can result in fever, scrotal pain and swelling

In rare cases, for both women and men, untreated gonorrhoea can spread to other parts of the body causing:

- inflammation and swelling of joints and tendons
- skin irritation and redness
- inflammation around the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or the heart.

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Next full review:

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Sources:

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