
For Teens: Understanding Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). It is also called a sexually transmitted disease (STD). It spreads when body fluids are passed during sex. Infections can occur in the genitals, anus, and throat. You may have no symptoms. Or symptoms can be mild to very painful.

Gonorrhea can be cured. But early treatment is important. Otherwise, it can lead to scarring of the reproductive parts of the body. It may even cause sterility. That means you may not be able to have children.

Gender words are used here to talk about anatomy and health risk. Please use this information in a way that works best for you and your provider as you talk about your care.

What to look for

Signs of gonorrhea often appear a few days after you catch it. Common symptoms include:

- Discharge from the penis, vagina, or rectum
- Pain or burning during urination
- Sore throat
- Pain in the rectum

Treatment

Gonorrhea can be treated and cured with antibiotics. It is most commonly treated with a shot. This is the preferred treatment. To keep from being infected again, your partner must be treated, too. And don't have sex until you're told it's OK.

If you don't get treated

Gonorrhea can spread through the body and cause swollen and painful joints. It can also scar the genitals and reproductive organs. And cause persistent pain or sterility. Females should look out for symptoms of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

What is PID?

PID (pelvic inflammatory disease) is an infection in women. It can cause mild or severe symptoms. These include pain in the lower belly, fever, vaginal discharge, abnormal vaginal bleeding, and pain during sex. Over time, PID can damage the reproductive organs. It can make it hard for you to have children.

Gonorrhea infection is most common in sexually active people 24 or younger. In females, it can cause serious problems like PID, ectopic pregnancy, and infertility. For this reason, yearly screening for chlamydia is recommended for all sexually active females ages 24 and younger, and in females ages 25 and older who are at risk for infection.

Tell your partner

It's important to talk with your partner about STIs and testing. If you don't feel safe talking face-to-face with your partner about testing, send a text or email. Or make a phone call instead. Ask someone for help if you're not safe.

Also encourage your partner to get treated. Otherwise, they can pass the disease back to you or on to others. If you have been diagnosed with gonorrhea, talk with your provider about expedited partner therapy (EPT). With EPT, you may be given a prescription or medicines to give to your partner without your partner needing to see a provider. EPT is available in many states but not all. Check with your provider.