

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease caused by the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. Gonorrhea is also known as the clap.

Who is at risk for gonorrhea?

Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhea. Gonorrhea can be transmitted during vaginal, oral and anal sex. Those who have multiple sex partners and unprotected sex are at greatest risk of infection. Since gonorrhea can also be spread by oral or anal sex, men who have sex with men are also at risk for infection. The highest rates of infection occur among sexually active adolescents and young adults. Women aged 24 years and younger and older women and all males at high risk are recommended to be screened annually. Men who have sex with men should be screened at least annually.

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Most females have mild or no symptoms. If symptoms do occur in females, they may include abnormal vaginal discharge, burning or pain during urination or bowel movement, lower abdominal pain, bleeding between menstrual periods or anal discomfort. Although many men may have no symptoms, symptoms may include discharge from the penis, burning or pain during urination or bowel movement or anal discomfort. If oral sex is performed, infections can also occur in the throat and often there are no symptoms associated with these infections. If untreated, gonorrhea infections can cause serious and permanent consequences, including infertility and other health problems in both females and males. Infection in newborn infants usually involves conjunctivitis.

How soon do symptoms appear?

If symptoms do occur, they usually appear two to seven days after exposure but can be as short as one day and as long as 14+ days.

How is gonorrhea spread?

Gonorrhea is spread by vaginal, oral or anal sex. Gonorrhea also can be passed from an infected mother to her baby during delivery.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

A person can spread the infection as long as he or she is infected and untreated. Without treatment, infection can persist indefinitely.

How is a person diagnosed?

Laboratory tests are available to diagnose gonorrhea. Some can be performed on urine, while others require that a specimen be collected from a site such as the cervix, penis, rectum or throat.

What is the treatment?

Gonorrhea can be treated and cured with antibiotics. To avoid reinfection, all sex partners should be tested and treated.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. A person can be reinfected after treatment.

Should adolescents or others be excluded from school, work or other activities if they have gonorrhea?

No. Since gonorrhea is transmitted through sexual contact only, exclusion is not necessary.

What can be done to prevent the spread of gonorrhea?

The most effective way to reduce the spread of gonorrhea is to abstain from sexual activity or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the spread of gonorrhea. A condom and other protection barriers, such as a dental dam, should be used for oral, vaginal and anal sex. Limiting the number of sexual partners an individual has also reduces the risk of becoming infected with gonorrhea. Infected individuals and all of their sexual partners need to be treated immediately at the time of diagnosis to prevent the spread of infection to others.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics. [Section 3, Summaries of Infectious Diseases]. In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2015: [pages 356-367]

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