

# I'M GONORRHEA Positive, Now What?

## What is Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a common STD that infects both men and women. You can get gonorrhea by having vaginal, anal or oral sex with someone who has gonorrhea. It can cause infections in the genitals, rectum and throat. It is a very common infection, especially among young people ages 15 to 24 years.

## What Does Having Gonorrhea Mean for My Health?

Some people who have gonorrhea have no symptoms. If you do have symptoms, they may be mild or mistaken for a bladder or vaginal infection. Females may experience painful or burning sensation when urinating, increased vaginal discharge or vaginal bleeding between periods. Men may experience a burning sensation when urinating, a colored discharge from the penis, or painful or swollen testicles. Men and women may also have rectal infections which cause discharge, anal itching, soreness, bleeding or painful bowel movements. With proper treatment, you can be cured. When medication is taken properly, it will stop the infection and could decrease your chances of having complications.

## What are the First Steps I Should Take to Manage My Infection?

If you test positive for gonorrhea, you should visit with your doctor or health care provider to discuss treatment of you and your sexual partners, as well as additional testing you may need.

## How Do I Find a Doctor?

Many different types of health care providers can treat gonorrhea. The health care provider that tested you will be able to provide you with treatment for your gonorrhea infection. Additional providers can be found at this website: [www.ndhealth.gov/STD/FindProvider](http://www.ndhealth.gov/STD/FindProvider).

## Is There a Cure for Gonorrhea?

Yes. Gonorrhea can be cured with the right antibiotics. However, it is becoming harder to treat some gonorrhea as drug-resistant strains are increasing. If your symptoms continue for more than a few days after receiving treatment, you should return to a health care provider to be checked again.

## How is Gonorrhea Treated?

Gonorrhea infections can be cured with antibiotics. It is important that you take all the medication your doctor prescribes to cure your infection. You should wait seven days after finishing all medications before having sex, and you should not have sex again until your sex partner(s) have completed treatment as well. Although medication will stop the infection, it will not undo any permanent damage caused by the disease.

Repeat infection with gonorrhea is common. You should be tested again about three months after you are treated, even if your sex partner(s) was treated.

## What Happens if I Don't Get Treated?

Untreated gonorrhea can cause serious and permanent health problems in both women and men. In women, untreated gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Some of the complications of PID include formation of scar tissue that blocks fallopian tubes, ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the womb), infertility and long-term pelvic/abdominal pain.

In men, gonorrhea can cause a painful condition in the tubes attached to the testicles. In rare cases, this may cause a man to become sterile. Rarely, untreated gonorrhea can also spread to your blood or joints. This condition can be life-threatening. Untreated gonorrhea may also increase your chances of getting or giving HIV.

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## How Can I Protect Myself and Others?

Taking your medication as instructed and also not having sex for seven days after treatment will ensure that you have been appropriately treated. In addition, ensuring that your current and past sexual partners (for the last three months) have been treated will also decrease your chance of becoming re-infected with gonorrhea.

The only way to avoid STDs is to not have vaginal, anal or oral sex. If you are sexually active, being in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has negative STD test results and using latex condoms the right way every time you have sex are the best ways to protect yourself. If you continue to be at risk for gonorrhea, you should be tested at least annually.

## I'm Pregnant. How Does Gonorrhea Affect My Baby?

If you are pregnant and have gonorrhea, you can give the infection to your baby during delivery. This can cause serious health problems for your baby. If you are pregnant, it is important that you talk to your health care provider so that you get the correct examination, testing and treatment, as necessary. Treating gonorrhea as soon as possible will make health complications for your baby less likely.

## Does This Mean I Am Immune to Gonorrhea?

No. Reinfection is possible. Yearly screenings are recommended for all women with new or multiple sex partners, a sex partner who has a sexually transmitted infection and all sexually active women younger than 25. People who have gonorrhea should also be tested for other STDs.

## Do I Need to be Excluded from Work, Child Care, School or Other Activities?

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

## Who Do I Need to Tell About My Infection?

You should tell your current sexual partners and all sexual partners that you have had in the last three months so they can be tested and treated for gonorrhea. It may be awkward, but telling partners about STDs is the right thing to do.

## How Do I Tell Others?

Being diagnosed with an STD while in a relationship can bring up lots of emotions. You may question your trust in your partner. Your partner may be upset, even angry, and that can be hard to deal with. Before blaming your partner for infidelity, keep in mind that some STDs don't always show up right away. It's possible that you or your partner got the STD in a previous relationship without even knowing it. The most helpful thing you can do is listen to your partner's concerns and fears and offer information about the STD and its symptoms. The most important thing to remember is that you and your partner both need to get medical care as soon as possible. If you and your partner have already had sex, stop having sex until you can both get tested. Talk to a doctor. You will probably need to take medicine as part of your treatment. Take all the medicine exactly as your doctor prescribes.

The North Dakota Department of Health can contact your partners without releasing your information to notify them that they have been exposed to an STD and provide information on how to get tested. Your health care provider may be able to help you notify your sexual partners as well. There are also anonymous partner notification tools such as <https://dontspreadit.com> or [www.inspot.org](http://www.inspot.org) that can notify your partners through email or text message. Telling partners about STDs is the right thing to do.

## Additional Information

- [www.ndhealth.gov/STD](http://www.ndhealth.gov/STD)
- North Dakota Department of Health
  - 800.472.2180
- [www.cdc.gov/STD](http://www.cdc.gov/STD)