

What do you know about...

Chlamydia

Vaginal health

Genital herpes

Gonorrhoea

Genital warts

Your guide to
sexual health and
wellbeing

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Your guide to sexual health and wellbeing

Gonorrhoea: your questions answered

Q. What is gonorrhoea?

A. Gonorrhoea is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by bacteria. Infection usually occurs in the genitals but can also be found in the throat, bottom or eyes.

Q. What are the symptoms of gonorrhoea?

A. Some people, particularly women with gonorrhoea, do not have any symptoms. This means that infection can often go untreated for some time.

If you do notice the symptoms of gonorrhoea, they will usually show up between 1 to 14 days after coming into contact with the infection. In most cases, it is easier for men to recognise gonorrhoea than women and is usually seen within a week.

Men with gonorrhoea may notice lots of green or yellow fluid coming out of the penis. This is sometimes accompanied by pain or a burning sensation when peeing, or a rash on the head of the penis. There may also be some discomfort and swelling of the testicles.

About 3 in 4 women do not have any obvious symptoms. Symptoms may take slightly longer to appear than in men. These tend to be increased discharge from the vagina, pain in the abdomen, or pain when

peeing. Sometimes women may experience bleeding in between periods, after sex, or have irregular or heavy periods.

Gonorrhoea can also infect other areas, for example, the throat or bottom. Infections in these areas are less likely to be noticed.

Q. How can I catch gonorrhoea?

A. You can catch gonorrhoea by having unprotected vaginal or anal sex, oral sex and by sharing sex toys. Gonorrhoea is **not** caught by kissing, even if one partner has the infection in his or her throat.

You or your partner could have picked up the infection from a previous partner without even knowing it. The greater the number of sexual partners you have, the greater the risk of infection.

Gonorrhoea can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during childbirth. This usually causes an eye infection (conjunctivitis).

Q. What tests are there for gonorrhoea?

A. If you or your partner are worried that you may have gonorrhoea, see a doctor or nurse straight away. Even if you don't have any symptoms, you may wish to be tested. You may have gonorrhoea even if your partner has tested negative – it is always a good idea to get a regular check-up for sexually transmitted infections whenever you change your sexual partner.

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You can visit your local GP surgery, or sexual health service. This is a specialist service that deals with sexually transmitted infections, is completely confidential, and you can go to without having to see your GP first.

Getting tested is straightforward and simple. Usually the test will involve a swab being taken, particularly if you have symptoms. Sometimes men will be asked to provide a urine sample. A swab looks a bit like a cotton bud, and collecting a sample only takes a few minutes and is not painful, although it may be a little uncomfortable for a moment.

Sometimes you can get the results straight away, or you may have to wait for 1 to 2 weeks. This depends on where you go for tests.

It is quite common to have more than one sexually transmitted infection at the same time. You should be offered a full sexual health 'screen', which includes tests for HIV, syphilis, and chlamydia.

Q. If I have gonorrhoea, what happens next?

A. Early treatment of gonorrhoea is very simple and usually involves being given a dose of antibiotics.

It is important to avoid sex (both oral sex and sex with condoms) until after you and your partner have both finished treatment.

You may be advised to have another test to check the gonorrhoea has gone completely. Some infections that are picked up abroad are not as easily treated with the antibiotics usually used in Scotland. If you or your partner think you may have caught gonorrhoea while abroad, tell the doctor.

Q. How do I tell my partner that I have gonorrhoea?

A. Some people can feel upset, angry, frightened or embarrassed about discussing sexually transmitted infections with their current or former partner(s).

If you do test positive for gonorrhoea, some of your previous partner(s) may need to be tested. Sexual health staff can help you by giving advice about who should be contacted and the best way to contact them. Your clinic can arrange, with your permission, to contact your partner(s) or give them a 'contact slip' asking them to contact the clinic. This is called 'partner notification' or 'contact tracing'. The staff will explain to the person that they may have been exposed to an STI and that they

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should go for a check-up. They do not give your name and your details will remain totally confidential.

Nobody can force you to tell your partner(s) about having an STI, but it is strongly recommended. Left untested and untreated, an infection can lead to serious illness.

Q. What if gonorrhoea is not treated?

A. If gonorrhoea remains untreated, there is a risk of passing the infection on to others. You are also at risk of serious complications.

For men, untreated gonorrhoea may lead to infection of the testicles, causing pain and swelling and, in some cases, infertility.

Some women who have untreated gonorrhoea may develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), and in some serious cases, infection can result in ectopic pregnancy and infertility. Infection while pregnant can result in the premature birth of the baby.

Q. How can you reduce the risk of catching gonorrhoea?

A. The best way to prevent all sexually transmitted infections, including gonorrhoea, syphilis and HIV, is to practise **safer sex**. This means using a condom for vaginal, anal and oral sex.

Safer sex

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can pass from one person to another through unprotected sex and sharing sex toys. You don't need to have lots of sexual partners to get an STI. However, you are more likely to have an STI if you have had a recent change in sexual partner or if you have had more than two sexual partners in the last 12 months.

Safer sex involves using condoms and dental dams for oral sex, condoms for vaginal sex and condoms with water-based lube for anal sex. This helps prevent infections being passed on to your partner.

Condoms are available free from sexual health services and young people's drop-in services. They are also for sale at most pharmacies and supermarkets. Always use a quality condom that displays the European CE Kitemark.

For more information, visit www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk or call the Information Line on 0800 22 44 88.