

# Gonorrhoea - Patient information leaflet

## Key points

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI)

It is easily passed from one person to another during sex, including oral sex

It often causes no symptoms

If gonorrhoea is not treated, or not treated with the correct antibiotics, it can cause serious long term health problems

You can protect yourself by ALWAYS using condoms when you have sex

## What is gonorrhoea?

- ❖ Gonorrhoea is an STI. It is caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

## How do you get gonorrhoea?

- ❖ You can catch gonorrhoea when you have sex with someone who already has the infection. This can be by vaginal sex, oral sex or anal sex.
- ❖ The infection is more common in young people, men who have sex with men, people who frequently change sexual partners and people who do not use condoms during sex.
- ❖ Even if you have had gonorrhoea before, you can catch it again

## What are the symptoms of gonorrhoea?

- ❖ 1 in 2 people with gonorrhoea infection in the womb / vagina and 1 in 10 people with gonorrhoea in the penis do not have any symptoms when they are infected. Infection in the rectum and throat usually causes no symptoms.
- ❖ The most common symptoms of vaginal infection are
  - A change in the colour or smell or amount of discharge from the vagina
  - Bleeding between periods or heavier periods
  - Burning feeling when passing urine
  - There may be pain or discomfort in the lower abdomen
- ❖ The most common symptoms of penile infection are
  - Burning when passing urine
  - Discharge from the end of the penis
  - There may be pain or discomfort in the testicles

## Do I need any tests?

- ❖ Yes, a sample from the genital area is needed to make the diagnosis. In some places a urine test may be used. You may also need swabs from your throat and anus.
- ❖ If you think you have been in contact with gonorrhoea, or other infections, or have symptoms that could be gonorrhoea you should visit your family doctor or local sexual health or venereology/dermatology clinic.
- ❖ The doctor or a specialist nurse will take a swab (sample) from the penis or cervix (neck of the womb) and send it to a laboratory where it will be tested for the bacteria that causes

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gonorrhoea. If you have had oral or anal sex, you should be sure to inform the doctor of this as the doctor should also take swabs from your throat and anus.

- ❖ If you have gonorrhoea, you should also be tested for other sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, syphilis and chlamydia, as you can have more than one infection at the same time.

### What is the treatment for gonorrhoea?

- ❖ It is important to receive treatment for gonorrhoea as quickly as possible, as the infection can cause complications and serious health problems if it is left untreated.
- ❖ Gonorrhoea is treated with one, or sometimes two, different antibiotics, one of which is usually given as an injection.
- ❖ You may also need treatment for chlamydia, as this infection is very common in people found to have gonorrhoea.

### Should I have sex if I have gonorrhoea?

- ❖ You should avoid any sex, even with a condom, until after both you and your partner(s) have finished all your treatment and your symptoms have gone.

### What are the possible complications of gonorrhoea?

- ❖ Gonorrhoea is unlikely to lead to any long-term problems if it is treated quickly. However, without treatment gonorrhoea can spread to other parts of your body and cause serious problems.
- ❖ Women can develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). This can cause abdominal and pelvic pain. It can also lead to infertility and ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy that occurs outside the womb). Men may develop a painful infection in their testicles.
- ❖ In rare cases, where gonorrhoea has been left untreated, it can spread through the bloodstream to cause infections in other parts of your body, such as your skin and joints.

### Gonorrhoea and pregnancy

- ❖ If you are pregnant, gonorrhoea can be passed from you to your baby during birth. This can lead to an infection of their eyes (conjunctivitis), which can lead to blindness if it is not treated.

### Do I need to tell my partner?

- ❖ If you do have gonorrhoea, it is essential that your current sexual partner(s), and any other sexual partner you have had over the last two months, is tested and treated.
- ❖ This is to stop you getting the infection again, and also so your partners do not develop complications.

### Further help and information

- ❖ If you suspect that you have gonorrhoea or any other sexually transmitted infection, then see your family doctor or local sexual health or venereology/dermatology clinic.