

## Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is bacterial sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can infect the genitals, rectum, throat, joints and it can even spread through the body. It is a common STD, especially among young people under the age of 25. It has many similarities with chlamydial infections, and they are both tested with the same swabs.

**Most women with gonorrhea do not have any symptoms.** The cervix is the reservoir where the bacteria can sit undisturbed for a while. Even when a woman has symptoms, they are often mild, such as **burning sensation when urinating, increased vaginal discharge and bleeding between periods or after intercourse.** Women with gonorrhea are at risk of developing serious complications, even if they don't have any symptoms.

In more advanced stages, it can cause moderate to severe pain in the lower abdomen and pelvis, caused by the spread of the bacteria to the fallopian tubes (**Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, or PID**). PID can then lead to infertility, increased risk of tubal pregnancy, or chronic pelvic pain. However, most cases are diagnosed and treated before the infection has a chance to spread up.

**To make a diagnosis, a swab** for gonorrhea (and chlamydia) can be collected from the **vagina** (this is the most accurate), either as a self-administered test or by a health care provider, or directly from the **cervix** (by a health care professional). The urine test for gonorrhea is less accurate than the vaginal test.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommends checking for gonorrhea (and chlamydia) **yearly** in all sexually active women **age 25 or younger**, because both STDs is common in this age group and the infection usually does not cause symptoms. It can be performed **any time** in women with symptoms such as discharge and pain, in women who engage in high risk sexual behavior, like multiple or infected sex partners.

Once the diagnosis is confirmed, **treatment is offered free of charge** (provided by BC CDC) with an antibiotic called cephalosporin (it can be a single injection, or oral one day treatment). **Antibiotic resistant is increasing**, so follow up is recommend. If symptoms continue for more than a few days after receiving treatment, swabs should be repeated. **It is not advisable to have sex until one week after treatment has been completed.**

Sexual partner(s) who have had contact with an infected person within 60 days of diagnosis, or the most recent sexual partner if it has been longer than 60 days, require treatment.

It is recommended that anyone who is diagnosed with gonorrhea have a repeat vaginal swab after six months from the diagnosis, because many people (as many as 25 percent) are re-infected from poorly treated or untreated sexual partners.

The most effective way to prevent gonorrhea is to avoid sexual intercourse. Failing that, stay in a monogamous relationship, and use condoms consistently every time you have sex.

*Dr Roberto Leon*