Non-Gonococcal Urethritis (NGU)

Urethritis is an infection of the urethra. The urethra is the tube that runs from the bladder to the outside through which the urine is passed. Urine and ejaculate fluid ("cum") in men both pass through this tube. Non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU) most commonly means there is an infection in the urethra.

Sometimes the cause of the infection can be found but often is not proven, though it is mostly due to a sexually transmissible infection (STI). About half of all NGU in Australia is due to Chlamydia trachomatis (chlamydia). Several other bacteria including E.Coli can also cause NGU.

Signs and Symptoms:

NGU may be present without people knowing it with nearly 50% of men with NGU not having any noticeable symptoms. If you are sexually active, under 35 years of age, changed partners recently, have unprotected sex, you are more at risk of getting NGU. Symptoms may include discharge from the urethra (this might only be noticeable when your penis is squeezed), burning or stinging when passing urine in both men and women, irritation of the penis, testicular pain or swollen testes, or wanting to pass urine more frequently than usual.

Treatment:

Specimens of urine and, where a discharge is present, swabs of the urethra can be tested to see if there is urethritis and/or if the cause can be identified. Tests for other STIs may also be done. NGU can be treated with antibiotics; usually treatments effective in treating chlamydia are used.

To ensure the infection has been cured: it is important to finish your course of treatment and not have unprotected sex until you and your partner have finished treatment and you both have returned to your doctor or clinic for a follow-up appointment. The doctor will test your urine again to see if you have completely cleared the infection.

If you find out that you have NGU, anyone you have had sex with in the past few months will also need to be treated. This is to make sure that they are cleared of the infection and to prevent you from being re-infected. If you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about telling your partner or partners, a member of your health care team can assist by contacting them for you. This is a confidential process and your name will not be mentioned. It is very important for your health, for that of your partner or partners and for the health of other people with whom they have sex that the tracing of contacts occurs.

Symptoms of NGU can persist after treatment. However, if you and your partner have been treated simultaneously, and safe sex is practised, there should be no chance of re-infection. If symptoms persist, see your doctor or clinic for follow-up.

Prevention:

NGU is mostly passed from person to person through sexual contact. You can get NGU through vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Practise safe sex. Always using condoms with water-based lubricant when you have vaginal or anal sex is the best way to avoid getting NGU. This reduces the risk of the condom breaking. Oil based lubricants should not be used as they weaken the condom and may cause it to break. If you are giving a man or woman oral sex (their genitals in your mouth) then the man should wear a condom or the woman should place a dental dam over her genitals to avoid genital fluids (semen or vaginal fluids) from entering your mouth (although the risk of transmission due to oral sex is minimal). If you put your mouth in contact with your partner's anus you should use a dental dam.

If you suspect that you have any of the above symptoms you should visit your GP, Sexual Health Clinic or a Genitourinary (Sexual Health) Specialist.

Health outcome:

NGU can persist for months if it is not treated. If not treated, it can cause pelvic inflammatory disease in women which can lead to infertility, chronic pelvic pain and risk of tubal pregnancy. In men, it can also cause inflammation of the testicles and infertility.

Other resources:


Related content


Help and assistance:

For more information on NGU, you can talk to a:

- doctor
family planning clinic (http://www.fpq.com.au/).