Non-Gonococcal Urethritis (NGU)

Quick facts:
- The most common causes of urethritis are the sexually transmissible infections (STIs) chlamydia, gonorrhoea, and Mycoplasma genitalium.
- Urethritis can usually be diagnosed by a urine test or a swab and treated with antibiotics.
- Non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU) is diagnosed when there are no gonorrhoea bacteria found through laboratory tests.

Urethritis is an infection and inflammation of the urethra. In a penis, urine and ejaculatory fluid (cum) pass through this tube. Non-specific urethritis (NSU) may be diagnosed if people have symptoms and they test negative for the most common sexually transmissible infections (STIs), then other bacteria, viruses or yeasts are the suspected cause.

Signs and symptoms
NGU may be present without people knowing. Symptoms may be very mild and can include discharge from the urethra, burning or stinging when urinating, irritation of the penis, testicular pain or swollen testes, or wanting to urinate more frequently than usual.

Testing and treatment
Specimens of urine and, where a discharge is present, swabs of the urethra can be tested to see if an STI cause can be identified. Tests for other organisms may also be done. If chlamydia, Mycoplasma genitalium, or trichomoniasis are the cause of NGU, it can be treated with antibiotics.

To ensure the infection has been cured, it is important to finish the full course of treatment and not have sex (not even with a condom) until 7 days after you and your partners have finished treatment and you have returned to your doctor or clinic for a follow-up appointment. Your doctor may test you again to see if you have completely cleared the infection.

If you have NGU, your sexual partners within 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. Contact tracing advice depends on the type of infection diagnosed. If the NGU is not caused by the three most common STIs your partners from at least the previous 4 weeks should be offered testing. Sample conversations and services that assist with telling partners in a confidential and anonymous way (if desired) are available online:

- Let Them Know (http://www.letthemknow.org.au/)
- Drama Down Under (http://www.thedramadownunder.info/)
- Better to know (http://www.bettertoknow.org.au/)

Urethritis and STI treatments are usually very effective. If symptoms persist, see your doctor or clinic for follow-up.

Transmission
You can get an STI or NGU by having sex without a condom.

If you’re having sex without a condom, the risk of getting an STI is higher:

- if you have casual partners
- the more casual partners you have
- if you have partners who have had sex in some countries outside Australia (especially if they haven’t used a condom in the past)
- if you have partners who have injected drugs
- for men who have anal sex with other men.

Prevention
Practise safe sex. Talk to your partners about sexual health, and make sure you get enthusiastic consent. Condoms are the best way to prevent NGU or other STIs and using them with a water-based lubricant will be more pleasurable and reduce the risk of the condom breaking. The only way to know that you do not have an infection is to get a sexual health check. If you have sex with new or different partners and do not use condoms, you’ll need to have more frequent sexual health checks.

Health outcome
NGU can persist for months if it is not treated. If untreated, NGU can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (https://www.staystifree.org.au/get-the-fact).
which can lead to infertility, chronic pelvic pain and risk of tubal pregnancy. It can also cause inflammation of the testicles and infertility.

**Other resources**

- For short animations about common STIs, see Queensland Health’s YouTube channel [Your Sexual Health](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyD3_5mPPgQ7H2zHxw-eO_ax9x5niAfV-a).
- For comprehensive safe sex, STIs, testing and treatment information for young adults see [Stop the Rise of STIs](https://stoptherise.initiatives.qld.gov.au/).
- For videos and resources developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities see [Young Deadly Free](https://youngdeadlyfree.org.au/).
- For a similar urethritis factsheet in Arabic, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Thai, or Vietnamese go to the [StaySTIFree](https://www.staystifree.org.au/get-the-facts/urethritis) website. Other translated resources about STIs are available from the [Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland](https://eccq.com.au/what-we-do/health/bbv/bbv-english/stis-resources/).

**Related content**

- [Safe sex](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthConditions/2/Infections-Parasites/138/Sexually-Transmitted-Diseases/774/Safe-Sex)

**Help and assistance**

Get qualified health advice 24/7 for the cost of a local call. 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

This factsheet provides general information and is not intended to replace the need to see a health professional or have a sexual health check. For more information on NGU or sexual health please talk to a healthcare provider. A doctor, nurse or health worker can assist with:

- providing appropriate tests, treatment and information about how to prevent STIs.
- helping people to ensure that their sexual partners get tested and treated.