

Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmissible infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

Gonorrhoea notifications have increased in all states and territories. Gonorrhoea has increased in heterosexual women and men, as well as in men who have sex with men. There have been two cases of multi-drug resistant (MDR) gonorrhoea detected in Australia that are highly resistant to all of the antibiotics that have been in routine use to treat gonorrhoea.

Signs and Symptoms:

Some people do not know they have the infection because they may have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually develop a few days or around a week after the bacteria have been introduced into the genital area while having sex with someone who has gonorrhoea.

Some of the symptoms of gonorrhoea include the following:

Women

- crampy pain in the lower abdomen just above the pubic bone
- a change in vaginal secretions (there may be more secretion or it may change in colour and/or smell)
- pain and/or burning sensation when passing urine
- bleeding or spotting between periods and/or after having sex
- pain during or after sex
- enlarged and painful infected glands near the vaginal opening (Bartholin's Glands).

Men

- a yellow discharge from the penis
- pain and burning sensation when passing urine
- if the infection travels up the urethra, the testes may become swollen and sore.

Men and women

Rectal Infections

Rectal infections are often asymptomatic. Symptoms when present can include:

- pain in the rectum
- discharge or mucus (bloody) from the anus
- feeling of fullness in the lower bowel.

Throat infections

Throat infections are usually asymptomatic. Symptoms when present can include:

- sore red throat, pus on the tonsils.

Sometimes, when people become infected with gonorrhoea, they may have a vaginal or urethral discharge that goes away after a week or so. This does not mean that the infection is cured. The only way to cure this infection is to obtain the correct treatment from your doctor, or sexual health clinic.

Testing:

Testing for gonorrhoea can be done by:

- taking a urine sample which is sent to the laboratory for testing (urine testing is preferable in men only)
- taking a swab from the cervix or deep in the vagina in women, or from the urethral opening in men or women (for women who have had a hysterectomy) or from the anus. This is done with a cotton swab or similar device and does not usually hurt
- taking a swab from the throat.

Queensland residents aged 16 years or older can order a free chlamydia and gonorrhoea urine test through [13 HEALTH webtest](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/sexual-health/chlamydia-test/) (<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/sexual-health/chlamydia-test/>). This service offers users 2 options to get tested, plus provides support and reminders to get treatment if your test is positive. If someone is at risk of having gonorrhoea in the throat or rectum this test will not detect infections in those sites.

There are other options to get tested. You can ask for STI testing at any [general practice clinic](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/service-finder/) (<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/service-finder/>), at [Aboriginal Medical Services](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service#community-controlled) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service#community-controlled>), [sexual health](#)

URL: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/188/65/gonorrhoea>

Version number: 15

Date published: 18/06/2019

Date generated: 18/10/2021

[services](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service#qsr) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service#qsr>) and some [community-based testing sites](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service#community-test-sites) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service#community-test-sites>).

Partner notification:

If, when a check up has occurred, someone finds out that they have gonorrhoea, then anyone with whom they have had sex with in the past few months will also need to be tested and treated. This is to make sure that they are clear of the infection and to prevent re-infection. For persons who feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about telling their partners; a member of the health care team can assist by contacting partners on their behalf. Names are not mentioned to ensure the process is confidential. Alternatively, online tools and services that assist with telling partners in a confidential and if desired, anonymous way are available:

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

Advising sexual partners of their exposure is essential for their health and the health of any other people they may have had sex with.

Treatment:

Gonorrhoea can be effectively treated with the correct treatment. Completing the treatment and any follow up examinations and tests is essential to make sure the infection has been cured. You should not have sex for seven days after treatment as you could still pass the infection to a partner. To ensure you don't get re-infected make sure your partners are informed and treated.

Transmission:

In men and women, gonorrhoea can infect the genitals through unprotected sexual intercourse and can lead to serious complications. It can also be spread between the throat and genitals through unprotected oral sex and to the rectum through unprotected anal sex. The eyes can also become infected. Transmission from fingers and use of sex toys during sex play has also been described.

Prevention:

The best way to avoid getting gonorrhoea is to practise safe sex: that is, to use a condom when having vaginal or anal sex and to use a condom or dental dam for oral sex. If someone has had unprotected sex, they may be at risk of gonorrhoea.

Gonorrhoea can infect the throat. It is therefore important to use protection when having oral sex. When a person is giving a man oral sex (his penis in their mouth), then condoms should always be used.

Health outcome:

Women

If not properly treated gonorrhoea can lead to pelvic inflammatory diseases (PID), which can lead to chronic pelvic pain, infertility and ectopic pregnancy.

Men

If not treated properly gonorrhoea can progress to the testes and thus lead to infertility.

Men and women

Gonorrhoea infection increases the risk of HIV transmission and acquisition.

Other resources:

Animated Movies:

- [Gonorrhoea in women](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/resources/animations#gonof) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/resources/animations#gonof>)
- [Gonorrhoea in men](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/resources/animations#gonom) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/resources/animations#gonom>)

Related Content

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

Help and assistance:

For more information on gonorrhoea, you can talk to:

- a doctor

- 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84), get qualified health advice 24/7 for the cost of a local call
- [a sexual health clinic](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service) (https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service)
- [a community based sexual health service](https://www.true.org.au/clinic) (https://www.true.org.au/clinic)