

Sexually Transmitted Diseases/Infections

Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea, sometimes referred to as GC, is a sexually transmitted disease caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, a bacterium that can grow and multiply in the reproductive tract. The bacterium can also grow in the mouth, throat, eyes and anus. Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhea, which is spread through contact with the penis, vagina, mouth or anus.

Men infected with gonorrhea may have no symptoms at all; however, some men may have signs or symptoms that appear two to five days after infection and include a burning sensation when urinating, or a white, yellow or green discharge from the penis. In men, gonorrhea can cause epididymitis, a painful condition of the ducts attached to the testicles, that may lead to infertility if left untreated.

In women, the symptoms of gonorrhea are often mild, but most women who are infected have no symptoms. The initial symptoms and signs in women may include dysuria, increased vaginal discharge, or vaginal bleeding between periods. In women, gonorrhea can lead to complications, and is a common cause of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Untreated pregnant women can transmit this infection to their babies during delivery. For this reason, screening of pregnant women for gonorrhea at intervals during pregnancy is required by North Carolina law.

Specific diagnosis of infection with *N. gonorrhoeae* can be performed by testing endocervical, vaginal, urethral (men only) or urine specimens. All persons found to have gonorrhea should be tested for other STDs, including chlamydia, syphilis and HIV.

Several antibiotics can successfully cure gonorrhea in adolescents and adults. Because many people with gonorrhea also have chlamydia, another STD, antibiotics for both infections are usually given together. People who have had gonorrhea and received treatment may get infected again if they have sexual contact with a person infected with gonorrhea.

For more information:

- CDC fact sheet, www.cdc.gov/std/Gonorrhea/STDFact-gonorrhea.htm
- CDC STD Treatment Manual 2010 – Gonococcal Infections, www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2010/gonococcal-infections.htm