



# UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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## Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhea*. It can infect the mucous membranes of the urethra, vagina, throat and rectum. This means it can be passed from one person to another by oral, vaginal and anal intercourse. The bacteria dies quickly upon exposure to dryness, cold and air. Therefore, it cannot be passed by handling door knobs or using toilet seats – only by sexual contact.

### Symptoms

Both men and women may have the disease without symptoms and can therefore unknowingly infect others. If a man has symptoms he may have a painful burning sensation when he urinates and/or yellowish-white discharge from the penis. These symptoms indicate urethritis. A simple slide test can distinguish gonorrhea from nongonococcal urethritis (NGU) in men. There is no blood test available to diagnose gonorrhea.

Some women may never have symptoms but as gonorrhea progresses, some symptoms may develop. Eventually, the disease progresses to the pelvic organs to cause what is known as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Symptoms may include fever, nausea, vomiting, and lower abdominal pain. Untreated cases can result in serious life-threatening illness and often permanent sterility.

### Treatment

Gonorrhea can be transmitted from one person to another even though you may not have symptoms. The use of a condom decreases the likelihood of getting gonorrhea, but it does not eliminate the possibility entirely. Therefore it is very important to do the following:

1. If you suspect exposure to gonorrhea, seek medical attention. You should abstain from any sexual activity.
2. Treatment consists of antibiotics based on medical history and organism resistance.
3. Abstain from intercourse during treatment (treatment of both partners at the same time reduces the risk of treatment failure). The use of condoms for intercourse until all partners have negative follow-up cultures is strongly recommended.
4. Return for a follow-up culture 7 days after treatment course is completed.

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