

# Gonorrhoea

## Information Sheet

### **What is it?**

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by a kind of bacteria. It is one of the most well known sexually transmitted diseases, but it is not as common as Chlamydia, genital warts or herpes. The bacteria infects the cervix, urethra and other reproductive organs. It is easy to treat and can be cured.

### **How is it spread?**

Gonorrhoea is spread through unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected person. Sometime it can be spread to the eyes by hands or direct contact with the infected fluids. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during birth. A person remains infected until he/she is properly treated.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Approximately 80 percent of women and 15-20 percent of men infected with gonorrhoea have no symptoms. They can unknowingly pass the infection on to their sexual partner(s).

If present, symptoms may appear 2 – 7 days after sexual contact with an infected person. Symptoms vary depending on which part of the body is infected.

Men may have yellowish-white discharge, or itching around the urethra. The urethra is the opening in the penis. Men may also have to pass urine more often and have pain when they do.

Women may have itching and discharge from the vagina. They may also have to pass urine more often and have pain in the lower abdomen.

In both men and women, gonorrhoea infection from oral sex may lead to sore throat and swollen glands. Gonorrhoea infection from anal sex may cause discharge from the anus.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

Gonorrhoea may be diagnosed by taking a swab of the discharge from the throat, cervix, urethra, or rectum and from a physical examination and medical history.

### **What are the complications?**

Untreated gonorrhoea in women may lead to a condition called pelvic inflammatory disease. Pelvic inflammatory disease is also known as PID. It is a serious infection of the lining of the womb or uterus, the fallopian tubes and the ovaries. Sometimes the fallopian tubes of a woman with PID are blocked by scar tissue and her eggs cannot pass through. When this happens, she may not be able to get pregnant. If the fallopian tubes are only partly blocked so that sperm can pass through, she may end up with a pregnancy inside the fallopian tube. This is called an ectopic pregnancy. Men with untreated gonorrhoea may become sterile when the tubes carrying the sperm are blocked by scar tissue. Some men may have swelling and pain in their testicles, a condition called epididymitis. Men may also develop a urethral stricture which makes urinating difficult.

In both men and women, untreated gonorrhoea may occasionally lead to arthritis. Infants who are born to mothers with untreated gonorrhoea may develop serious eye infections which could lead to blindness.

**How is it treated?**

Gonorrhea is treated with antibiotic pills. The medication of choice is Cefixime 400 mg in a single dose. Sometimes gonorrhea is treated with an antibiotic injection. It is important that you complete the treatment as directed by your doctor or clinic. If you have PID or epididymitis, you may need to go into a hospital and be treated with intravenous antibiotics.

**What about sexual partners?**

All sexual partners within the past 3 months should be examined and treated. If you have not had sex in the past 3 months, your last sexual partner should be examined and treated. Tell your partner(s) that having no symptoms does not mean there is no infection. Your Public Health Nurse can help you notify your partner(s). Your name will be kept confidential.

**If follow-up important?**

It is a good idea to have follow-up test 1 to 2 weeks after you have completed the treatment to make sure that you are cured.

**Remember:**

- ✓ Take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor or clinic.
- ✓ Do not have oral, vaginal or anal sex while you and your sexual partner(s) are being treated.
- ✓ You can get reinfected every time you have sex with an untreated partner.
- ✓ Use condoms to lower the chance of getting STDs and to prevent pregnancy.
- ✓ It is impossible to have more than one infection at a time, so it is important to be tested for other STDs
- ✓ If you are taking the Birth Control Pill, use an additional form of birth control while taking antibiotics and for at least 7 days after you finish your antibiotic pills.