



# Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is a serious infection caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, or gonococcus.

It is easily treated soon after infection, but may cause lifelong complications (particularly in women) if not diagnosed and treated early.

In South Australia, gonorrhoea is common in Aboriginal people, men who have sex with men, and those who have had sex overseas. People in these groups should always have a test for gonorrhoea as part of a sexual health check-up.

## Symptoms

Both men and women may have gonorrhoea without symptoms, so you can be infected without knowing that anything is wrong.

### Symptoms that may occur:

In males, a yellow discharge from the penis and pain when passing urine may occur within about a week of acquiring the infection.

In females, there may be a vaginal discharge, burning when passing urine, irregular vaginal bleeding, lower abdominal pain or pain during sex. If untreated, the infection may spread to the reproductive organs causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). This may damage the fallopian tubes and result in infertility.

In both sexes gonorrhoea can occur in the rectum (anus) and also the throat. It does not usually cause symptoms in either of these sites.

## Transmission

Gonorrhoea is sexually transmitted by oral, anal or genital sex.

Infection may occur in the urethra (penis), cervix, throat and rectum. Infection in the throat occurs during oral sex and infection in the rectum may happen during anal sex.

Gonorrhoea is sometimes detected in the rectum of women who have not had anal intercourse, due to spread from the genital area.

Gonorrhoea can be passed from a woman to her baby during birth.

## Diagnosis

Diagnosis requires laboratory tests to look for bacteria under a microscope and grow them in culture. Swab specimens may be taken from the urethra, throat, cervix or rectum. Sometimes, if there are no symptoms, it is possible to check for gonorrhoea using a urine specimen. Your doctor will advise if this test is suitable for you.

When you have a swab taken at the STD clinic, sometimes a presumptive diagnosis of gonorrhoea can be made 'on the spot'. These results require further tests, which usually confirm the diagnosis in a few days.

## Treatment

Gonorrhoea can be simply and effectively treated with a single antibiotic injection (ceftriaxone).

Some people are allergic to the medication used to treat gonorrhoea. You should tell your doctor if you have any drug allergies (especially penicillin). After treatment for gonorrhoea, you must remain in the clinic for observation for 30 minutes.

## Follow-up

Five to 10 days after treatment, another test is done to check that the gonorrhoea has been cured. Do not have sex until you know the result of this test.

For men, symptoms such as a discharge or irritation will settle down faster if you do not have sex, masturbate, or squeeze the penis.

Sex partner(s) should be promptly tested and treated for their own health (to prevent complications), and to reduce further spread of the infection. If your partner has been treated for gonorrhoea, do not have sex until you both have follow-up tests that confirm that you are cured.

It is very important to have a blood test three months after you have been treated for gonorrhoea. This test will detect blood-borne infections that you might have been exposed to at the time you had gonorrhoea.

## Prevention

Use a condom. Condoms prevent gonorrhoea very effectively, if worn properly.

Choosing to avoid sex with casual partners, and having sex with fewer partners, are strategies that can reduce the risk of contracting gonorrhoea.

Have regular STD check-ups, including a swab test for gonorrhoea:

- after sex with a new partner,
- immediately, if symptoms occur, eg discharge, painful urination,
- if a sexual partner has gonorrhoea or symptoms of gonorrhoea
- if you have had sex with a partner overseas.

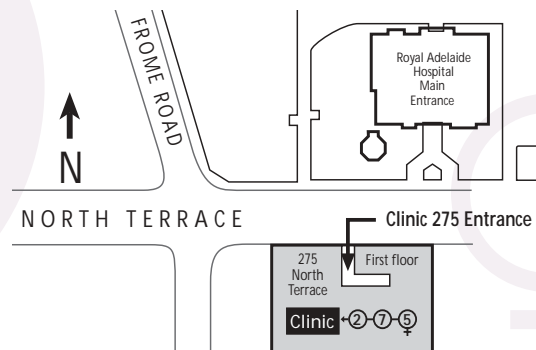
## More information

STD Services web site:  
[www.stdservices.on.net/std/gonorrhoea](http://www.stdservices.on.net/std/gonorrhoea)

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### Sexually Transmitted Diseases Services

#### Royal Adelaide Hospital

Free and confidential advice, testing and treatment for all STDs including HIV/AIDS

No appointment necessary

Monday, Thursday & Friday

10am – 4.30pm

Tuesday & Wednesday

11.00am - 6.30pm

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[www.stdservices.on.net](http://www.stdservices.on.net)

# clinic