

What is Gonorrhoea?

- Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by infection with *Neisseria gonorrhoea*, a type of bacteria
- It is spread by vaginal, anal, or oral sex and usually infects the urethra and/or cervix
 - It can also infect the rectum, anus, throat, pelvic organs, or even the eyes
- Pregnant people can transmit gonorrhoea to their newborn during childbirth
- In females, untreated gonorrhoea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and lead to infertility or ectopic pregnancy
- In males, it can cause epididymitis, which may lead to infertility
- The incidence of gonorrhoea is rising in Canada, and it is becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics, making it more difficult to treat
 - In 2020, there were 4893 reported cases of gonorrhoea in Alberta
 - Gonorrhoea disproportionately affects sexually active people ages 20-29, especially men

What are the symptoms of Gonorrhoea?

- Many people have no symptoms of gonorrhoea, but the infection can still be spread to others
- Symptoms can include painful urination and abnormal discharge from the penis or vagina
- In females, early symptoms of gonorrhoea may be mistaken for a bladder or vaginal infection
- If symptoms occur, they usually begin 2 to 5 days after exposure, but may take as long as 30 days to appear.
- If gonorrhoea is untreated, it can lead to serious complications such as PID, infertility, and miscarriage
- Gonorrhoea infection can spread to other parts of the body including the joints, skin, heart, or blood
 - This is called disseminated gonococcal infection (DGI) and it can lead to severe effects such as arthritis, sepsis (infection of the blood), endocarditis (inflammation of the heart), and meningitis (infection of the tissues surrounding the brain and spinal cord)
 - Treatment of DGI usually requires hospitalization.

How is Gonorrhoea diagnosed?

- The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that all sexual active people under the age of 25 should be screened for gonorrhoea
- Pregnant people should also be screened during their first prenatal visit
- Gonorrhoea is diagnosed by a physician after a physical examination and lab tests
- You may be asked to provide a urine sample, and/or have the affected area swabbed
- Your doctor will also send a report to your provincial or territorial health unit if you test positive for gonorrhoea

How is Gonorrhoea treated?

- Gonorrhoea is curable and causes no long-term problems if it is treated early
- Gonorrhoea is treated with antibiotics (usually cefixime and azithromycin)
- You should not have sexual contact with anyone while being treated, or at least 7 days after treatment
- Some strains of gonorrhoea are resistant to previously recommended antibiotics
 - If gonorrhoea symptoms do not go away after treatment, you may be retested with a gonorrhoea culture and prescribed an alternative antibiotic
- Treatment does not prevent you from getting a gonorrhoea infection in the future
- To prevent gonorrhoea, practice safer sex by limiting your sex partners, knowing whether your partner engages in risky sexual behaviours, and use a condom or dental dam during sex

References:

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