



### Diseases Fact Sheet - Gonorrhea

#### South Dakota Department of Health

**Office of Disease Prevention Services - 605-773-3737 -(1-800-592-1861 in South Dakota only)**

This material is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical care. We are not able to answer personal medical questions. Please see your health care provider concerning appropriate care, treatment or other medical advice.

#### What is it?

Gonorrhea is an infection that is spread through sexual contact with another person. The gonorrhea germs are found in the mucous areas of the body (the vagina, penis, throat and rectum).

#### Who gets gonorrhea?

Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhea. Most often, gonorrhea is found in younger people (ages 15-30) who have multiple sex partners. Gonorrhea is reported more frequently from urban areas than from rural areas.

#### How is gonorrhea spread?

Gonorrhea is spread through sexual contact. This includes penis to vagina, penis to mouth, penis to rectum and mouth to vagina contact. Gonorrhea can also be spread from mother to child during birth.

#### What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Men infected with gonorrhea will have burning while urinating and a yellowish white discharge from the penis. Those few women with symptoms will have a discharge from the vagina and possibly some burning while urinating. Infections in the throat and rectum cause few symptoms.

#### How soon do symptoms appear?

In males, symptoms usually appear two to seven days after infection, but it can take as long as 30 days for symptoms to begin. Often, there are no symptoms for people infected with gonorrhea; 10 to 15 percent of men and about 80 percent of women may have no symptoms. People with no symptoms are at risk for developing complications to gonorrhea. These people also spread this infection unknowingly.

#### When and for how long is a person able to spread gonorrhea?

From the time a person is infected with gonorrhea, he or she can spread the disease. A person can continue to spread the infection until properly treated.

### **Does past infection with gonorrhea make a person immune?**

Past infection does not make a person immune to gonorrhea. Previous infections with gonorrhea may allow complications to occur more rapidly.

### **What is the treatment for gonorrhea?**

Gonorrhea is treated with penicillin or other antibiotics in pill form or by injection into the buttocks. All strains of gonorrhea are curable but this disease is becoming more and more resistant to many standard medications.

### **What happens if gonorrhea goes untreated?**

If a person is not treated for gonorrhea, there is a good chance complications will occur. Women frequently suffer from pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a painful condition that occurs when the infection spreads throughout the reproductive organs. PID can lead to sterilization in females. Men may suffer from swelling of the testicles and penis. Both sexes may suffer from arthritis, skin problems and other organ infections caused by the spread of gonorrhea within the body.

### **What can be done to prevent the spread of gonorrhea?**

Sexual relations should be approached responsibly.

- Abstain from sexual contact, or be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Limit your number of sexual partners.
- Use a condom.
- If you think you are infected, avoid sexual contact and visit a local sexually transmitted disease (STD) clinic, hospital or your doctor.
- Bring your sex partners with you so that they can be treated.

### **Related Sites:**

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- South Dakota Department of Health
  - [STD Testing Sites](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)