

Gonorrhea in Women

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a common sexually transmitted disease or infection (also called an STD or STI). Other names for gonorrhea are clap, drip, dose, and strain.

The infection usually starts in the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. The bacteria may also infect the throat or rectum during oral or anal sex. Gonorrhea that is not treated may spread into the bloodstream and to other parts of the body.

- It may infect the joints and cause pain and swelling (arthritis).
- It may spread to the brain and cause meningitis.
- It may infect the heart.
- It might cause death.

Also, if you have gonorrhea and then have unsafe sex with someone who has HIV, you are more likely to be infected with HIV.

What is the cause?

The infection is caused by bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. It is usually passed from person to person during oral, vaginal, or anal sex. The infection can pass from a pregnant woman to her baby during birth. Gonorrhea can cause eye infections in the baby.

What are the symptoms?

Many people have don't have symptoms. This means you could pass the infection to your sexual partner without knowing that you are infected.

If you do have symptoms, they usually start 2 to 10 days after you were exposed to the disease. Symptoms may include:

- Thick, creamy, yellow discharge from the vagina
- Burning or pain when you urinate
- Menstrual periods that are heavier than usual
- Pain in your belly, especially during sex
- Spotting between periods or after sex
- Fever

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and sexual and medical history and examine you. Tests may include:

- Urine test
- Pelvic exam

- Swab for a test sample from your cervix (the lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina) during a pelvic exam

How is it treated?

Gonorrhea is treated with antibiotic medicine. You will need to take more than 1 antibiotic. If only the cervix is infected, proper treatment should clear up the infection in about 10 days.

If the infection has spread to your uterus and ovaries, you may need medicine given through an IV. Depending on how sick you are, you may need to stay in the hospital. Gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which in turn can cause:

- Belly pain that doesn't go away even after the infection is treated
- Infertility (a loss of the ability to have children)
- A higher risk of tubal pregnancy, which is a pregnancy outside the uterus and a dangerous condition requiring emergency surgery

Be sure to tell your healthcare provider if you are or may be pregnant. Your provider will prescribe an antibiotic that is safe for the baby.

You will be asked about your sexual partner(s). Your infection will be reported to the local health department and your sexual partner(s) will be told that they have had contact with someone who has a sexually transmitted infection. (Your name will not be given.) This will help them get prompt treatment for the infection. It can also help prevent new infections.

How can I take care of myself?

- Take your medicine for as long as your healthcare provider prescribes, even if you feel better. If you stop taking an antibiotic too soon, you may not kill all of the bacteria and you may get sick again. If you are pregnant, ask if there are any special precautions you should take.
- Take nonprescription pain medicine.
- Tell everyone with whom you have had sex in the last 3 months about your infection. Or you can ask the clinic staff to tell them without using your name. Your sexual contacts need to be treated even if they don't have any symptoms.
- Don't have sex until both you and your partner have finished all of the medicine and your provider says it's OK. Then always use condoms every time you have sex.
- Have a checkup every year. See your provider between checkups if you are having symptoms of vaginal infection or discomfort, especially up in the abdomen, during sex.
- Ask your healthcare provider:
 - How and when you will hear your test results
 - What other STDs you should be tested for
 - How long it will take to recover

- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to normal activities
 - When it is safe to have sex again
 - How to take care of yourself at home
 - What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them
- Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I help prevent gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea can be a serious health threat to you and the people you have sex with. It can no longer be treated with many antibiotics that are usually used to treat infections. Prevention is very important.

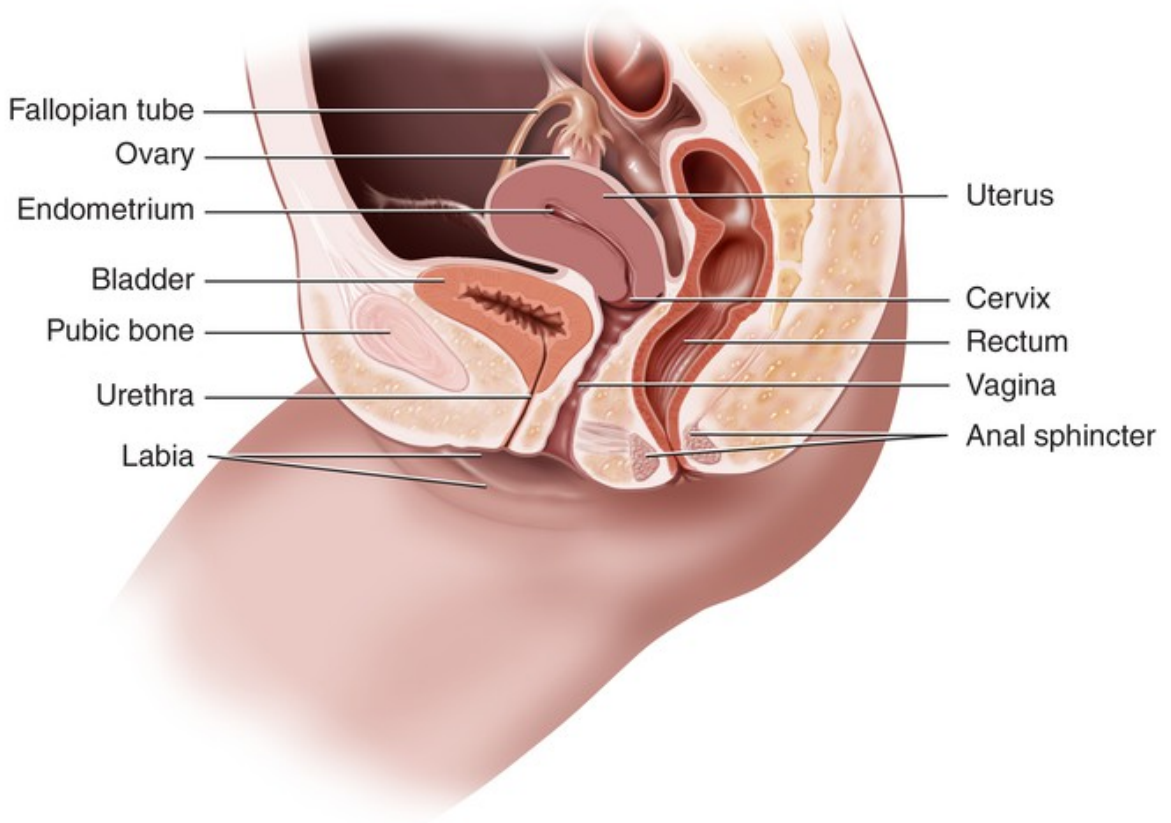
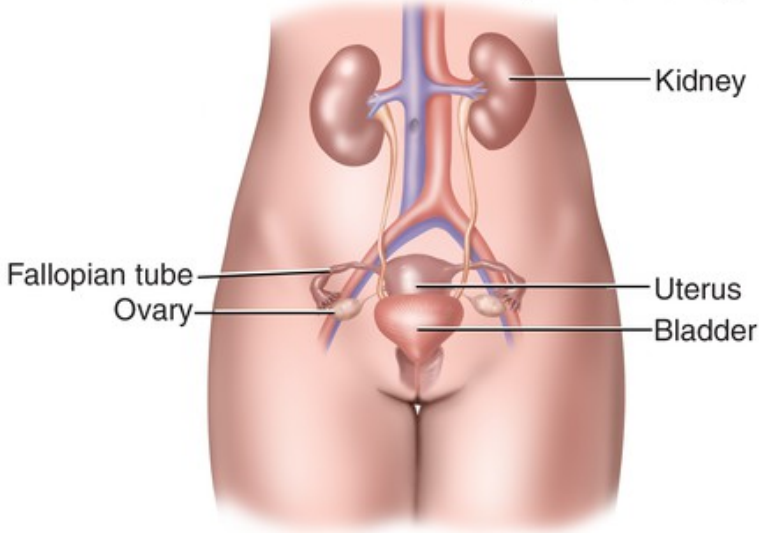
- Use latex or polyurethane condoms during foreplay and every time you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- Have just 1 sexual partner who is not sexually active with anyone else.
- If you have had sex and are worried that you may have been infected, see your healthcare provider even if you don't have symptoms.
- If you are pregnant, ask your healthcare provider to test you for gonorrhea so you can help prevent infection in the baby.
- If you have been sexually assaulted, you may need to be treated to prevent sexually transmitted infections. You should have an exam within a few hours of the assault (and before showering or bathing) even if you don't want to press charges. You can also ask about being protected from pregnancy when you have the exam.

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Female Pelvis

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