

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacteria (germ) *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

Gonorrhoea

It is the most common sexually transmitted infection. In 2000 there were almost 20,650 cases diagnosed in STD clinics (also called genitourinary medicine clinics) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.* This is an underestimate as not everyone will attend for testing.

It affects men and women but can go unnoticed by both as initial symptoms may be so mild. Men show symptoms more often than women.

The incubation period (time from exposure to the infection to the display of symptoms) is 2-10 days

Men may notice some pain or burning when passing water (dysuria), a frequent need to pass water, a discharge from the tip of the penis. Men who have received anal intercourse may notice pain in the rectum and discharge. Women are more often symptom free but may notice some vaginal discharge, dysuria and the same rectal symptoms as men, if they have had anal intercourse.

Infection can pass to the throat from oral sex but very often this is symptom free. Close genital contact without full penetrative sex can also transmit the infection. Toilet seats, sharing towels etc cannot spread the infection.

Complications for men include infection within the prostate gland, the epididymis and the testicle; this can lead to problems with fertility.

Complications for women include infection in the fallopian tubes (the tubes leading from the uterus to the ovaries) and the [Bartholins](#) glands. Untreated infection can lead to chronic pelvic inflammatory disease and subfertility. Women whose fallopian tubes have been damaged by infection are more at risk from ectopic pregnancy.

Occasionally (and rarely) the infection spreads throughout the bloodstream or to the joints.

During childbirth, pregnant women can infect their babies causing a severe conjunctivitis.

Diagnosis is made by taking swabs from the potentially infected areas. This is best done in a genitourinary clinic. Find the address of your nearest clinic on <http://www.lovelife.uk.com/>. It is essential that contact is made with all your sexual partners so that they can be tested and treated if necessary. If you have one sexually transmitted infection, then you may also have another, so you will be screened for other infections at the clinic.

Treatment is with antibiotics; it is important that you take all the tablets (now often a single dose). Increasingly, some strains of the bacteria are becoming resistant to some antibiotics, so it is very important to be seen at a clinic who can properly investigate your infection.

Remember:

Limit your risk of infection by reducing the number of people you have sex with and by using a condom every time you have sex.