

# Gonorrhea

## *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*

### For the Health Care Professional



***Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by bacteria and can be cured. It is the second most common STD reported in Wisconsin. Gonorrhea is a reportable disease and therefore must be reported to the local health department in the area where the patient lives. Under Wisconsin law, BOTH the laboratory and the health care provider who ordered the test must report cases of Gonorrhea to the health department.***



### How is it spread and who gets gonorrhea?

- ▶ Gonorrhea is the second most reported bacterial infection in the State of Wisconsin. People between the ages of 15-29 years old have the highest prevalence of infection. Gonorrhea can cause infection in the vagina, urethra, rectum, and throat, and many cases are asymptomatic. It is therefore important for providers to ask appropriate questions of patients to determine how to test adequately test for gonorrhea. Questions such as: “How often are you having vaginal, anal, and/or oral sex?” or “When was the last time you had sex with a man, woman, or transgender person?” can elicit more information than questions such as: “Do you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex?”. Because pregnant women may have gonorrhea and have no symptoms, newborn infants may need to be treated prophylactically with an antibiotic ointment for the eyes.
- ▶ **Language for the patient:** *Gonorrhea is spread by having vaginal, anal and or oral sex with someone who has it. Babies can get gonorrhea during birth if the mother has it as well.*  
*If you have sex, you can get gonorrhea however there are groups of people more likely to get gonorrhea:*
  - *Young people who have sex.*
  - *If you or your sex partner have any STD, you can also get gonorrhea.*
  - *If you have more than one sex partner, and/or a new sex partner.*



### What are the signs and symptoms?

- ▶ Some men with gonorrhea may have no symptoms at all. Symptoms in men may include: a burning sensation when urinating, a white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis, or painful or swollen testicles (although this is less common). Most women with gonorrhea do not have any symptoms. However, symptoms in women: painful or burning sensation when urinating, increased vaginal discharge, or vaginal bleeding between periods; which can be mistaken for other infections. Rectal infections may either cause no symptoms or cause symptoms in both men and women that may include: discharge, itching, bleeding, or painful bowel movements. Conjunctivitis (eyes) can occur in both men and women and can also be found in the throats of men and women having oral sex (though not thought to be an important cause of pharyngitis).
- ▶ **Language for the patient:** *Most people have NO symptoms when they have gonorrhea, but find out when they get tested. Men and women may have a burning feeling when urinating, discharge (penile or vaginal). Men may also feel the need to urinate more often. Women may have lower back pain and/or spotting between periods. If you get these symptoms, it is usually 3-10 days after having sex with someone who has gonorrhea.*



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## What are the testing and treatment options?

- ▶ After determining what sites are appropriate for testing (See questions under, “How is it spread and who gets gonorrhea?”) ask your laboratory what types of gonorrhea tests can be used and whether they need to be physician and/or patient collected. The current **2021 CDC STD Treatment Guidelines** recommendation for the treatment of uncomplicated gonorrhea is: 500mg of ceftriaxone IM for people under 300lbs or 1gm of ceftriaxone for people over 300lbs. If this is a more complicated gonorrhea infection, please consult the current CDC STD treatment guidelines for recommendations on treatment. Patients should have a test of cure (TOC), especially if they are at high risk of re-infection. Consult with your laboratory to determine how many days after treatment you should perform a TOC as sometimes remnants of the bacteria can create a false positive test result if performed too soon.
- ▶ **Language for the patient:** *You can get tested for gonorrhea at a doctor’s office, family planning clinic and an STD clinic. Getting tested and treated early can prevent serious problems and stop the spread of gonorrhea. If you have gonorrhea, get your most recent sex partners of the past three months tested AND treated. They may not have symptoms but still have gonorrhea. If you have sex with same partner, you can get infected again unless they get tested and treated. You can get treated with a one time dose of ceftriaxone. Women who don’t get treated can get pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) which is very painful. PID can lead to making it hard to have a baby and cause scar tissue which can lead to ectopic pregnancies. In men, it can lead to pain in the testicles and sterility. Both men and women who don’t get treated can get painful arthritis.*



## How can your patient prevent getting gonorrhea?

- ▶ Partner Services is a valuable service for the prevention of repeat infection in patients. The primary purpose of Partner Services is to ensure the spread of STDs is contained by contacting the sexual partners of patients and ensuring those partners are tested and/or treated based on confidential conversations with the patient. Partner Services can also assist health care professionals a number of ways when dealing with the treatment and/or further testing of the patient. Because of the burden of disease in certain areas of Wisconsin, Partner Services may not be available for patients with a gonorrhea infection. Below are messages health care professionals can use to help prevent future infection.
- ▶ **Language for the patient:** *There are many ways to prevent getting gonorrhea and it’s as easy as ABC: Avoid having sex until you feel prepared to protect yourself. For instance; Be monogamous or have sex with just one person who only has sex with you and doesn’t have any STDs. You can find out if both of you have an STD like gonorrhea by getting tested together. Condoms can protect you from getting gonorrhea but only when they cover the body parts that are in contact. If you are not using condoms for oral sex, you can still get gonorrhea.*

