Gonorrhea

December 1997

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a disease caused by bacteria called *Neiserria gonorrhoeae*, the gonococcus. The bacteria that cause gonorrhea are found in the mucous areas of the body (the vagina, penis, throat and rectum) and in semen or vaginal fluids. It is one of the most commonly reported sexually transmitted diseases (STD) in the United States.

Who gets gonorrhea?

Any person who has sex 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.

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Most men infected with gonorrhea will have burning while urinating and a yellowish white discharge from the penis. Most women do not have symptoms. Those few women with symptoms will have a discharge from the vagina and possibly some burning while urinating. Women may also have abdominal pain or abnormal bleeding. Infections in the throat and rectum cause few symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may be noticed 2 to 7 days after having sex with an infected person, but it can take as long as 30 days and often, there may be no symptoms, particularly in females.

How is gonorrhea diagnosed?

Gonorrhea is diagnosed through laboratory examination of penile or vaginal discharges to see if bacteria are present. Specimens from the throat may also be examined.

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 is the treatment for gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is treated with antibiotics in either injection (needle) or pill (by mouth) form. 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?

Without treatment, there is a good chance that complications will develop from gonorrhea infection. Women frequently develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a painful condition that occurs when the infection spreads throughout the reproductive organs. PID can make women unable to have children or cause them to be at risk for ectopic pregnancy. 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.

How can gonorrhea be prevented?

Not having sex is the only sure way to avoid getting gonorrhea or any other STD. Otherwise, limiting the number of one's sexual partners reduces the chance of being exposed. Using condoms correctly with all partners will decrease the possibility of becoming infected. If you think you are infected, avoid any sexual contact until you have visited a doctor, hospital or STD clinic. If you are infected, notify your sex partners immediately so they can be tested and treated.

IF YOU HAVE ANY OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT ANY SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE, PLEASE CALL THE VIRGINIA STD/AIDS HOTLINE AT 1-800-533-4148.

VDH VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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