**The Facts About Gonorrhea**

**What is gonorrhea?**

Gonorrhea infection is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacteria *Neisseria gonorrhoeae.*

**How common is gonorrhea?**

Gonorrhea infection is the second most frequently reported communicable disease in the United States. During 2015-2016, the rate of reported gonorrhea cases increased 18.5% and increased 48.6% since the historic low in 2009. In 2016, persons aged 15-44 accounted for 91.9% of reported gonorrhea cases with a total of 468,514 cases reported. The rate of reported gonorrhea cases was higher in males than the rate among females.1

**How is gonorrhea spread?**

Gonorrhea infection can be spread through vaginal, anal, or oral sex. It can also be spread from an infected mother to her baby during delivery.

**Does gonorrhea cause symptoms?**

Gonorrhea is usually symptomatic in males and usually asymptomatic in females. About 10-20% of infected women are asymptomatic and about 25% of men have minimal symptoms.4Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhea. Regardless of symptoms, once infected, a person can spread it to others. CDC recommends yearly gonorrhea screening for at- risk persons and some people should be tested for gonorrhea even if they do not have symptoms or know of a sex partner who has gonorrhea.3

**What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?**

Many people do not have symptoms when they have a gonorrhea infection; but when symptoms do occur, common sites of infection include the endocervix of women and the urethritis of men. Cervicitis, abdominal pain, and discharge can occur in women. Epididymitis, painful urination, and discharge can occur in men. Proctitis, in either sex, is an infection in the rectum that can cause rectal discharge, pain, and bowel movement complications.5

**Are there any treatments available for gonorrhea?**

Gonorrhea infection is usually curable with antibiotics but the drugs of choice today are beginning to show resistance. CDC recommends dual therapy for the treatment of gonorrhea. It is important to take all medication prescribed to cure gonorrhea and return to a health care provider if symptoms continue after treatment.4 Although medication will stop the infection, permanent damage done by the disease is irreparable.

**What complications can result from gonorrhea?**

One potential complication of gonorrhea infection in a female is pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). In women, PID spreads to reproductive organs and can cause infertility.

**Gonorrhea Continued…**

If a pregnant woman has gonorrhea, she may give the infection to her baby as the baby passes through the birth canal during delivery. This can cause blindness, joint infection, or a life-threatening blood infection in the baby.2

Another possible complication of a gonorrhea infection is disseminated gonococcal infection (DGI). Untreated gonorrhea can spread to the blood or joints within two weeks of being infected with gonorrhea. DGI is usually characterized by arthritis, tenosynovitis, and/or dermatitis.3

**Does gonorrhea affect the spread of HIV?**

In both males and females, untreated gonorrhea can cause serious health problems and increase the risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.3

**Can gonorrhea be prevented?**

Yes; yearly screenings, 100% consistent condom use, and limiting number of sexual partners can reduce the risk of gonorrhea infections. Gonorrhea infections can be prevented by refraining from sexual activity until a person is in a lifelong, mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner. Mothers should be screened for gonorrhea infection during pregnancy to prevent the spread of gonorrhea infection to babies.

References:

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