

Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) and may have no symptoms. If detected, it can be cured. If undetected, it can lead to illness and infertility. This is why screening for it is so important.

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a bacteria that infects certain cells in the body. Specific mucous membranes are especially vulnerable to gonorrhea, such as the cervix in the vagina, urethra, anus, the throat, and (much less commonly in adults) the lining of the eyes. Once it gets inside the body, it can cause inflammation and scarring of the fallopian tubes and uterus, which can lead to infertility. In rare cases, gonorrhea can spread and infect the skin, the heart, and the lining of the brain and spine.

How common is gonorrhea?

There are an estimated 820,000 new cases of gonorrhea every year in the United States¹. It is most common in people ages 18-24.

How common is gonorrhea at UO?

Gonorrhea rates at the University of Oregon are similar to the national averages.

How could I be exposed to gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea transmission requires direct contact between mucous membranes, the moist soft parts of the body. If any of those areas (the tip of the penis, vagina, anus, or throat) come into contact with a sexual partner's mucous membranes without a barrier device, there is risk of infection. At University Health Center, we find gonorrhea most commonly infecting genitals and anuses and very rarely in the throats of UO students. Unprotected genital/genital sex and genital/anal sex are the most common routes of transmission.

If I have been exposed to gonorrhea, how long until I might have symptoms?

Often, there are NO SYMPTOMS after an infection. If you do have symptoms, they can start anywhere between two to 10 days.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sexually Transmitted Infections Among Young Americans. http://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/2013/SAM-Infographic-2013.html?s_cid=nchhstp-nr-sam-011

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea infections often have no symptoms. That's why screening (testing when you have no symptoms) is so important. However, individuals might experience irritation and pain in infected areas (genitals or anus/rectum), abnormal discharge, or discomfort with urination. Gonorrhea can also infect the back of the throat through oral sex, causing a mild sore throat or most commonly no symptoms.

How long after infection will a screening test turn positive?

Testing one week after infection will detect most cases, and after two weeks detects almost all cases.

How do you test for gonorrhea?

We test for gonorrhea infection by sampling the mucous membranes directly.

- For penises, this means giving us a urine sample, which washes the gonorrhea in the urethra into the sample cup.
- For vaginas, this might mean a urine sample or we'll give you a vaginal swab so you can do your own collection.
- For rectums, this means a self-collected rectal swab.
- For the back of the throat, this means a throat swab.

Test results generally take a week to return.

How will you notify me of my test results?

We relay negative results via a secure message to you via myUOHealth student portal.

We relay positive results by calling you. If you don't answer, we'll leave a generic message to call us back to discuss your recent test results.

What happens if I test positive for gonorrhea?

It is important to know that gonorrhea is treatable and curable. But we understand that a positive test may still cause fear or anxiety. We will schedule an appointment for you with a UHC clinician as soon as possible. At that visit, you will get all the information you need, have your questions answered, and get treated.