

URETHRITIS

WHAT IS URETHRITIS?

Urethritis is inflammation of the urethra (the opening from which urine is passed). The urethra is inside the penis in men (where it also carries semen), and just below the clitoris in women. The urethra is often affected by sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

The symptoms of urethritis are usually discomfort passing urine and discharge from the urethra. However, urethral infection may be present with no symptoms at all. Urethritis is diagnosed by either a urine test or by taking a swab from the urethra.

WHAT CAUSES URETHRITIS?

Urethritis occurs as a result of exposure to infections in body fluids during vaginal, oral or anal sex.

The time from exposure to the onset of symptoms varies from a day to a few weeks.

The most common causes of urethritis are:

1. Chlamydia
2. Gonorrhoea
3. Non-specific infections

Chlamydia and gonorrhoea are easily detectable by laboratory tests. These two infections always require treatment of sexual partners to prevent complications such as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and infertility in women and to prevent further transmission. Non-specific urethritis (NSU) is diagnosed when tests for chlamydia and gonorrhoea are negative.

There are several bacterial causes of NSU, including the newly discovered cause, an organism called *Mycoplasma genitalium*. This infection is thought to behave in a similar fashion to chlamydia and requires treatment.

Other bacteria commonly found in the vagina, mouth or anus may cause NSU in some cases and viruses such as herpes and adenovirus (a cause of 'colds') can occasionally cause NSU.

TREATMENT

Urethritis can usually be treated with a single dose of antibiotic, either orally or by injection, depending on the cause and circumstances. In some instances you may need a longer course of medication. Symptoms should start improving within a few days, but can take a week or more to resolve completely.

LETTING SEXUAL PARTNERS KNOW

This is essential in all cases if you are found to have chlamydia or gonorrhoea. If you have NSU, you should discuss with your treating doctor whether your partner/s should be notified. If you have difficulty notifying partners, we can assist while keeping your identity confidential.

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Urethritis. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.