



Urethritis

What is urethritis?

Urethritis is an inflammation of the male urethra. The urethra is the tube in the penis that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body.

What causes urethritis?

Urethritis is often caused by sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like gonorrhea, chlamydia, or herpes simplex (a virus). It can also be caused by other organisms that are not sexually transmitted; for example the normal bacteria that grow in the genital area can infect the urethra. Sometimes urethritis can be caused by infections of the bladder or prostate, or recent procedures that may involve the urethra. For more information about gonorrhea and chlamydia, see [HealthLinkBC File #08a Gonorrhea](#) and [HealthLinkBC File #08l Chlamydia](#).

How is it spread?

The sexually transmitted organisms that cause urethritis are spread through unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of urethritis can include:

- clear or mucous-like discharge from the penis;
- pain or burning when urinating;
- itching or irritation in the urethra.

It is possible to have urethritis and not have any symptoms.

To find out if you have urethritis, you should be examined by a health care provider and have lab tests done.

What are the complications?

Some potential complications of untreated urethritis include:

- recurring urethritis;
- swelling and pain in one or both testicles and may result in infertility;
- infection of the bladder or prostate.

What is the treatment?

Urethritis that is caused by bacteria may be treated with antibiotic pills. In order to effectively treat the infection, if you were given pills, it is important to follow the instructions for taking the treatment carefully and finish all the pills. If the infection was sexually transmitted, sexual partners should be tested and treated. It takes time for the infection to be cleared from the body, so it is important that you do not have any oral, vaginal or anal sex for 7 days after you and your partner(s) start the antibiotic treatment.

How can I reduce my chance of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Practice safer sex by using a condom

When used correctly, male and female condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms are less effective at protecting against STIs transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, such as herpes simplex, genital warts (human papillomavirus (HPV)), and syphilis (when sores are present).

Important things to remember when using condoms:

- Check the condom package for damage. Do not use a condom that has been damaged.
- Check the expiry date. Do not use a condom that is outdated.

- Carefully open the package so that the condom does not tear. Do not use a condom that has been torn.
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects such as rings, studs, or piercings.
- Store condoms at room temperature.
- A new condom should be used every time you have sex. Do not reuse condoms.
- Do not use 2 condoms at once.
- Use only water-based lubricants with male latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion, or baby oil can weaken and destroy latex.
- Water or oil-based lubricant may be used with polyurethane condoms.
- Use only condoms that are made of latex or polyurethane (plastic). Latex condoms and polyurethane condoms are the best types of condoms to use to help prevent pregnancy and STIs. (Animal skin condoms can help prevent pregnancy but don't work as well as latex or polyurethane condoms to prevent STIs.)

Get vaccinated

Some STIs, such as hepatitis A, B and human papillomavirus (HPV) can be prevented with vaccines. Talk to your health care provider about how to get these vaccinations.

Know your sexual health status

If you have recently changed sexual partners, or have multiple sex partners, getting regularly tested for STIs will tell you if you have an infection. Some people can have an STI and not

have any symptoms. Finding and treating an STI reduces the chances of passing infections on to your partner(s).

The more partners you have, the more likely you are to be exposed to STIs.

Talk about prevention

Talk to your partner(s) about STIs and how you would like to prevent them before having sex. If you are having trouble discussing safer sex with your partner(s), talk about it with your health care provider or a counselor.

For tips on how to talk to your partner(s), visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource <https://smartsexresource.com/sex-talk/talk-about-it>

Informing Partners

If you have a sexually transmitted infection and are sexually active, it is important to tell your sexual partner(s). This will enable them to make decisions about their health and getting tested.

For More Information

For more information on how you can reduce your chance of getting an STI, see [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STIs\)](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority