

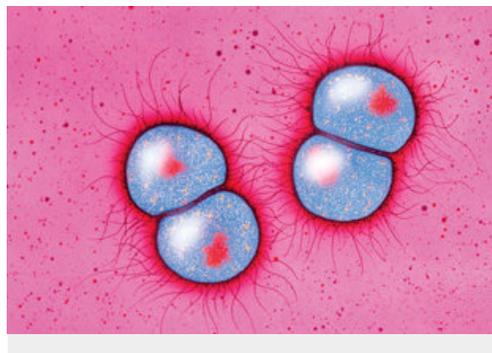
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The Terrifying "New" STD

By [Self Magazine](#) | [Healthy Living](#) – Thu, Feb 21, 2013 3:38 PM EST



Whitney Joiner, SELF

Unless you're living in a convent, you probably worry about sexually transmitted diseases. And, frankly, you should. HPV can lead to cervical cancer; herpes is with you for life. But gonorrhea? Really?

"Most of my friends don't think about it, and if we do, we're just glad it's treatable," says Amanda, a 26-year-old in New York City.

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The Old Cures Aren't Working

Sure, conventional wisdom says that doctors can easily cure gonorrhea with antibiotics—good news for the 300,000 people a year in the United States who get it, especially women: Although gonorrhea typically clears up on its own eventually, if it goes untreated it can leave us with pelvic inflammatory disease or infertility.

But here's the scary part: We may not be able to treat it anymore. The bacterium that causes gonorrhea, *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, is very crafty, says Gail Bolan, M.D., director of the CDC's Division of STD Prevention. It mutates quickly and has grown resistant to every class of antibiotics used to treat it since the meds first became available in the 1940s. In 2007, doctors turned to cephalosporins, their last antibiotic hope.

Soon enough, cases resistant to some cephalosporins started popping up in Europe and Asia, says Manjula Lusti-Narasimhan, M.D., a scientist at WHO headquarters in Geneva. This January, researchers announced in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* that almost 7 percent of the gonorrhea cases they studied in one Canadian clinic were resistant to cefixime, a widely used cephalosporin.

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It's Hitting Close to Home

So should we be worried? The CDC isn't aware of any cephalosporin-resistant infections on U.S. soil, but "it's only a matter of time" until one shows up, Dr. Bolan says. Truth is, it might already be here but just hasn't been reported to the CDC yet.

Scarier still, women often don't develop gonorrhea symptoms. When we do, the signs seem like stuff we deal with all the time, such as bleeding between periods or vaginal discharge. And then there's pharyngeal (throat) gonorrhea, which you can get from performing oral sex. Its symptoms are even subtler—it feels like a regular sore throat—but left untreated, it can enter the bloodstream and lead to skin lesions and even arthritis. Follow oral sex with vaginal sex and you could become infected at both sites!

Here's What You Must Know

First, if you're hooking up, both you and your guy should get tested. (The CDC says annually for those with new or multiple partners.) If you're diagnosed, your doc will figure out which drug or combo of drugs might work. But isn't prevention better? Um, yes! So for both vaginal and oral sex, use a condom. Every. Single. Time.

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