

# Urethritis

## What is urethritis?

Urethritis is an inflammation of the urethra. The urethra is the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body. In a penis, the urethra also carries semen.

## What causes urethritis?

Urethritis is often caused by Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) like gonorrhea, chlamydia or herpes simplex virus. For more information about gonorrhea, chlamydia and herpes simplex virus, visit [HealthLinkBC File #08a Gonorrhea](#), [HealthLinkBC File #08b Chlamydia](#) and [HealthLinkBC File #08d Genital herpes](#).

Other organisms that are not sexually transmitted can infect the urethra. For example, the normal bacteria that grow in the genital area can infect the urethra. In other cases, urethritis can be caused by infections of the bladder or prostate, recent procedures or trauma that may involve the urethra, anatomical issues or irritants to the urethra.

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

Sexual abuse must be considered if there are symptoms of unexplained or repeated infections in children.

## How is it spread?

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

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of urethritis can include:

- Clear or mucous-like fluid from the urethra
- Redness around the opening of the urethra
- Pain or burning feeling when urinating
- Itching or irritation in the urethra

Other than the usual symptoms of urethritis, adults or children may also experience:

- Abdominal pain
- Unwillingness to urinate
- Loss of bladder control

It's also possible to have urethritis and not have any symptoms.

## What are the potential complications?

If the urethritis is caused by a bacteria and is not treated, it can lead to pain and swelling in one or both testicles and may cause infertility.

## What is the treatment?

Urethritis that is caused by bacteria may be treated with antibiotic pills. For effective treatment, carefully follow the treatment instructions and, if you were given pills, finish them all.

If the infection was sexually transmitted, sexual partners should be tested and treated. It takes time for the infection to clear from the body, so it's 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.

If you or your partner(s) do not finish the treatment, miss pills or have unprotected sex before you have finished all of the medication, the infection could stay in your body or may be passed back to you or your partner(s). It could cause health problems later. If this happens, talk with your health care provider who will help you to decide if you or your partners need more treatment. Your health care provider may offer other treatments if another cause is identified.

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

These are some steps you can take to reduce your chances of getting an STI:

- Get informed: Understand different STIs, how to prevent them and which sexual activities are likely to pass them

- Get tested: Get tested regularly with your partner(s) for STIs so you know and can act as soon as possible
- Have safer sex: Use condoms, barriers or lube to make sex safer
- Get vaccinated: Vaccines are available to prevent some infections, including HPV, hepatitis A and hepatitis B
- Talk to your partner(s): Discuss consent, safer sex, sexual activities and preferences, and STI testing. Communication can help protect the health of you and your partners, and help you have positive sexual relationships and experiences

### **For more information**

For more information on how you can reduce your chance of getting an STI, visit [HealthLinkBC File #080 Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).

