

Urethral Discharge in Men

The urethra is the tube that carries urine from the bladder to outside the body. The opening of the urethra—which also carries sperm—can easily be seen at the tip of a man’s penis. A urethral discharge is any liquid other than urine or sperm that comes out of this opening. Urethral discharge is uncommon in women and harder to recognize when it does occur. In men, the discharge may be clear, white, yellow, green, or even rust-colored. It may also be accompanied by other symptoms, such as needing to urinate frequently or a burning sensation inside the penis during urination.

Urethral discharge is usually a sign of an infection, called “urethritis.” Most often, this type of infection is the result of a sexually transmitted disease. For example, the bacteria that cause gonorrhea or the bacteria that cause chlamydia can result in urethritis. The protozoa that cause trichomoniasis can also result in urethritis. Any of these diseases may cause an infection in the urinary tract that causes a discharge from the urethra.

Unfortunately, an infection may also be present without any visible symptoms. Therefore, a person may have one of these diseases but not have any discharge. A person may also have a discharge that seems to go away by itself, yet still be infected with the disease. Both of these conditions are serious because, since the person has no symptoms, the infection may be unknowingly spread to a partner during sex. Some of the diseases can cause serious damage, too. Gonorrhea, for example, can cause heart valve damage; infectious arthritis (which destroys the joints); sterility; premature labor; stillbirth; or blindness in an infant. Chlamydia can cause bladder infections, sterility, arthritis, or recurring, painful pelvic infections.

Fortunately, urethritis usually responds to treatment with antibiotics. If the infection has spread to the testicles or to the female fallopian tubes or ovaries, however, it may recur later despite treatment.

To reduce your risk of getting urethritis or any sexually transmitted disease, limit yourself to one uninfected sexual partner. Though they are not 100 percent effective, condoms will also help protect you against sexually transmitted diseases. Spermicides, the sponge, and the diaphragm do not provide reliable protection against sexually transmitted diseases. Also, whenever you enter into a new sexual relationship, it’s important to communicate honestly and openly with your partner about whether either one of you has had unprotected sex in the past. Remember, it’s possible to have been infected with gonorrhea, trichomoniasis, chlamydia, and other sexually transmitted diseases and have no symptoms. All of these can be passed by either oral, vaginal, or anal sex.

If you have a urethral discharge or want to be tested for any sexually transmitted disease, please call your doctor or other medical professional. You may need to provide a urine sample for testing, so don’t urinate right before your appointment. If you are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease, make sure to tell all your sexual partners. Even if they do not have any symptoms, they will also need treatment.

The treatment itself will probably involve taking antibiotics, but different types of urethritis require different types of medication. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have any allergies to medications. Also, remember to take the medication as directed until it is all gone, even if your symptoms disappear

within a few days. Do not have any form of sex until both you and your partner have finished all your medication. Also, do not drink alcohol—even beer or wine—while taking antibiotics. If your symptoms return after you finish the full course of your medication, call your doctor or other medical professional again.

It's important to note that HIV disease and syphilis do not cause urethritis and are not cured by the medications used for any of the infections discussed here. However, since you might have been exposed to these diseases, it may be a good idea for you to be tested for them, as well. Remember, like other sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and syphilis can also be present without presenting any symptoms.

After treatment for urethritis, some men will note a clear or white discharge from the tip of the penis. When no other symptoms are present (such as irritation), this usually is nothing more than a normal secretion from the urethra. However, men who have been successfully treated for urethritis caused by gonorrhea will occasionally develop another form of urethritis later on. Again, call your doctor or other medical professional if you have any concerns.

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For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at **members.kp.org**. Here you'll find the Health encyclopedia, which offers more in-depth information on this and many other topics, including “Chlamydia,” “Gonorrhea,” and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.