

Gonorrhea: A Disease That Spreads in Silence

Rouyn-Noranda June 28 2018 - The Public Health Department of the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) of Abitibi-Témiscamingue wants to inform the population of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, that far from being a problem of the past, gonorrhea remains a public health issue with rising rates of infection.

The increase in the number of cases of gonococcal infection reported in Abitibi-Témiscamingue in 2017 continues to rise into 2018. Since the start of the year, 34 cases have already been reported, which already accounts for over half of the total number of cases reported in 2017. In comparison for the years 2016 and 2017, there were 16 and 42 cases reported for those years respectively. From 2011 to 2015, there was an average of 23 cases reported per year.

The increase in reported cases is a cause for concern as a number of the reported cases of infection have required hospitalization or further medical treatment. In addition, at present, the risk factor and spread of infection remains unknown. Since the first choice of treatment for gonorrheal infections is a course of antibiotics, there is a concern that there could be a raise in antibiotic resistance. This phenomenon could increase if the rates of infection are not controlled.

It should be noted that the increase in cases has affected more adults ages 20 to 34 (59%), followed by those ages 40 to 44 (23%). Men are almost as affected as women. In several cases the first point of consultation for infected patients was in the emergency room.

A Frequently asymptomatic disease

Gonorrhea is a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) that spreads easily because it is most often lacking in symptoms (asymptomatic). Due to this lack of symptoms, a person could become infected and transmit the infection without even realizing it. This kind of bodily "radio silence" can be even stronger depending on the location of the infection on the patient's body. Depending on the type of sexual contact, gonorrhea can infect the genital tract (the cervix, uterus and fallopian tubes in women; the urethra in both men and women), in addition to the throat or anus.

Due to the bacterial origin of gonorrhea, a person cannot develop an immunity to it and as a result is at risk of being infected several times.

Safer Sex

What can be done to avoid gonorrhea? “Presently, using protection during sexual activity remains the best possible means of avoiding infection. It is also important to use a prophylactic for all forms of penetrative sexual activity, and a dental dam during oral sex. It important to get tested if you change sexual partners or have unprotected sexual contact with an individual, even if there is only one instance”, explains Marie-Michèle Grenier, Nurse and consultant.

If a person waits, the symptoms can appear between two and seven days after transmission. Symptoms usually include discharge from the genitals, tingling or burning sensations during urination, and lower abdominal pain during sexual relations, abnormal bleeding, and sore throat. The main complications of gonorrheal infection can include pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, and ectopic pregnancy. Blindness can occur within infected newborns.

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