

Gonorrhea

Why is gonorrhea important?

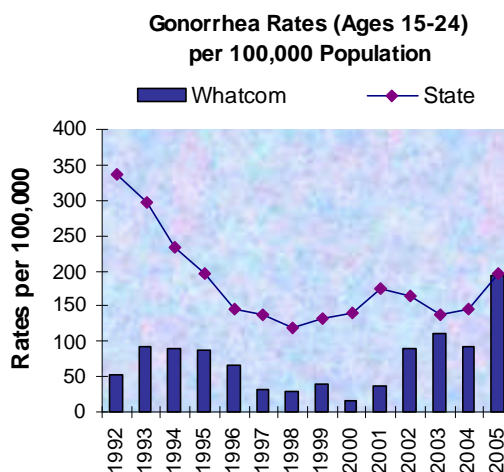
Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted bacterial disease that can be cured with antibiotics. Though not all infected individuals show symptoms, about 50 percent of women with gonorrheal infections will have symptoms of an abnormal vaginal discharge or painful urination. Men usually have a discharge from their penis and painful urination that may be severe. Infection may also cause eye infection, sore throat, or rectal infection. If untreated, gonorrhea can lead to additional health problems, such as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in women, which can result in infertility, ectopic pregnancy and chronic pelvic pain. The most common complication in men is epididymitis, an infection starting near the testicles.

How are we doing?

The chart and table to the right provide a comparison of reported gonorrhea rates in Washington and Whatcom County for the ages 15-24 per 100,000 population. The table also provides the number of cases from 1992—2005.

Whatcom County has consistently had low rates of gonorrhea. Rates have also been lower than the state. However, the rates in both 2003 and 2005 had risen to just below that of Washington State. In 2005, the Whatcom County incidence rate per 100,000 for those ages 15-24 was 194 compared to 196 for the state.

While antibiotics are generally effective in curing gonorrhea, strains of the bacteria *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* have become resistant to the usual antibiotics used to treat the disease. This has made treatment of some infected individuals much more challenging. Gonorrhea screening and treatment is available in Whatcom County through the federally-funded *Infertility Prevention Project*. The Health Department, Juvenile Detention, and Mt. Baker Planned Parenthood provide project services, as long as funding is available.



**Gonorrhea Rates & Cases (Ages 15-24)
per 100,000 Population**

Year	Whatcom County		Washington State	
	Rate per 100,000 Population (Ages 15-24)	# of Cases	Rate per 100,000 Population (Ages 15-24)	# of Cases
1992	52	12	336	2,349
1993	92	22	296	2,114
1994	89	22	233	1,678
1995	87	22	195	1,418
1996	65	17	147	1,089
1997	33	9	138	1,048
1998	28	8	119	929
1999	40	12	133	1,067
2000	16	5	140	1,149
2001	38	12	176	1,481
2002	90	29	164	1,403
2003	112	37	137	1,189
2004	92	31	145	1,283
2005	194	67	196	1,758

What remains to be done?



While the *Infertility Prevention Project* provides important services to some county residents, routine testing is needed for all individuals at risk—whether they are symptomatic or not—so that gonorrhea cases do not go undetected. Recommended screening protocols and testing procedures should be implemented in all healthcare settings, especially community clinics, hospital emergency departments, urgent care clinics and by healthcare providers who see teens and young adults. In addition, treatment with the appropriate antibiotics is critical to curing this disease and preventing further transmission.