Urethritis (inflammation (pain), redness and/or swelling) of the urethra (tube where urine comes out). Sometimes it is called non-specific urethritis (often known as NSU) or non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU). In this leaflet we use the term non-specific urethritis. This means inflammation of the urethra when the cause is not yet known and the sexual infection gonorrhoea (which can cause inflammation) has been ruled out. It is possible for men and women to have non-specific urethritis, but it is more difficult to diagnose in women.

This leaflet only discusses non-specific urethritis in men. It gives you information about non-specific urethritis, what you can do if you are worried you might have it and advice on how to protect yourself from infection.
What does the test involve?
How accurate are the tests?
Where can I get a test?
Will I have to pay for tests and treatment?
What is the treatment for non-specific urethritis?
When will the signs and symptoms go away?
Do I need to have a test to check that the non-specific urethritis has gone?
What happens if non-specific urethritis isn’t treated?
Can non-specific urethritis go away without treatment?
How soon can I have sex again?
Will I know how long I’ve had the infection?
Should I tell my partner?
How will I know if non-specific urethritis has affected my fertility?
How can I protect myself from non-specific urethritis and other sexually transmitted infections?
Where can I get more information and advice?
Using a service
Helplines and websites.

What causes non-specific urethritis?
There are many different causes. Some, but not all, are passed on through having sex. If you have non-specific urethritis there may be more than one cause, and in some men a cause is never identified.

If you have signs of inflammation in your urethra it is common to be told you have non-specific.
urethritis straightaway, before the cause is known. You will
probably be tested for sexually transmitted or possibly urinary tract infections to try to find out what the cause of the inflammation is. You may have to wait for these results.

Causes of non-specific urethritis include:

**Sexually transmitted infections**

- Chlamydia is a common cause of non-specific urethritis. Up to 50 per cent of men who have inflammation of the urethra are found to have chlamydia.
- Herpes and trichomonas vaginalis are less common causes.

**Other organisms**

- Tiny organisms called mycoplasma genitalium and ureaplasma urealyticum can live in the body without causing symptoms but sometimes they multiply quickly, leading to inflammation of the urethra. Being ill or stressed could cause this to happen. Up to ten per cent of cases of non-specific urethritis are thought to be caused by ureaplasma urealyticum, and up to 20 per cent of cases by mycoplasma genitalium. It is thought these organisms may be transmitted sexually.
- Some bacteria that live in the rectum and the mouth and throat can be passed on during sex and cause inflammation.
- Bacteria that cause infection in the urinary tract (kidneys, bladder and urethra) or the prostate gland can lead to inflammation of the urethra.
- A vaginal infection in your partner, such as thrush or bacterial vaginosis, may trigger non-specific urethritis in you.
Damage to the urethra
This can be caused by friction during vigorous sex or masturbation, or inserting objects into the urethra. Frequently inspecting or squeezing your urethra can also irritate it and cause inflammation - some men do this if they have recently had an infection or they are worried they might have one.

Antibacterial liquids
Applying liquids such as tea tree oil, antiseptic or disinfectant can cause inflammation.

Sensitivity or irritation
Rarely, inflammation can occur if your skin is very sensitive to chemicals, such as those in latex (in condoms, for example), spermicide or soap.

How is non-specific urethritis passed on sexually?
During unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex, organisms which cause inflammation can pass into the urethra. Non-specific urethritis can occur in any man who is sexually active. You don’t need to have lots of sexual partners.

Not all cases of non-specific urethritis are caused by having sex.

You cannot get non-specific urethritis from kissing, hugging, sharing baths or towels or from toilet seats.

What are the signs and symptoms?
Not all men who have inflammation will show any signs or symptoms, or they may be so mild they are not noticed.

If signs and symptoms do occur they usually
show up within 2–4 weeks of contact with an infection, but they can sometimes appear within a day or two (depending on the cause of the inflammation). In mild cases, symptoms may not show up for several months. If you do get signs and symptoms you might notice:

- A white or cloudy discharge from the tip of the penis, usually more noticeable first thing in the morning. Sometimes this discharge is seen only when massaged out of the penis.
- Difficulty, pain or a burning sensation when passing urine.
- The feeling that you need to pass urine frequently.
- Itching or irritation at the end of the urethra.

Depending on the cause of the inflammation there may also be other symptoms that are specific to particular infections.

1 How will I know if I have non-specific urethritis?
You can only be certain if you have a test. Because the inflammation can be caused by sexually transmitted infections you may wish to be tested for infection if:

- you have, or think you might have, symptoms
- you have recently had unprotected sex with a new partner
- you or your partner has had unprotected sex with other partners
- a sexual partner tells you they have a sexually transmitted infection.

1 How soon after sex can I have a test?
It is important that you don’t delay getting a test if you think you may have an infection. You can:
do a test even if you haven’t got symptoms. It is possible to be tested for signs of inflammation within a few days of having sex, but it may be necessary to wait up to two weeks before you can do a test to check for infections such as chlamydia. Routine tests for mycoplasma genitalium and ureaplasma urealyticum are not currently available in the UK.

What does the test involve?
As well as testing for signs of inflammation it is recommended that you also have a test for chlamydia and gonorrhoea at the same time. The type of sample that is collected will depend on whether you have any signs and symptoms and what infections you are being tested for.

The tests may involve a doctor or nurse:
• using a swab to collect a sample of cells from the entrance of the urethra
• asking you to give a urine sample
• examining your penis.

A swab looks a bit like a cotton bud, but is smaller and rounded. It sometimes has a small plastic loop on the end rather than a cotton tip. It is wiped over the parts of the body that could be affected and easily picks up samples of discharge and cells. It only takes a few seconds and is not usually painful, though it may be uncomfortable for a moment.

In some services they can look at the sample under the microscope straightaway and tell you if there are signs of inflammation. It may also be possible to give you the results of tests for other sexually transmitted infections straightaway. You may however have to wait 1–2 weeks to find out