Non-specific urethritis (NSU)

This factsheet is one of a series which give information on the following range of infections and diseases: bacterial vaginosis, chlamydia, cystitis, genital herpes, genital warts, gonorrhoea, hepatitis (A, B and C), non-specific urethritis, penile cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), prostate cancer, pubic lice, scabies, syphilis, testicular cancer, thrush and trichomonas vaginalis.

Free copies of any of these factsheets are available from GP surgeries, NHS sexual health (GUM) clinics, or your local health promotion unit (in the phone book under your local Health Authority).

Non-specific urethritis (NSU) is an inflammation of a man’s urethra. This inflammation can be caused by several different types of infection, the most common being chlamydia.

Men – know your body

1 Scrotum
2 Urethra
3 Penis
4 Foreskin
5 Glans
6 Testicles

Signs and symptoms

The symptoms may include:

• pain or a burning sensation when passing urine
• a white/Cloudy fluid from the tip of the penis. This may be more noticeable first thing in the morning
• feeling that you need to pass urine frequently

Often there may be no symptoms, but this does not mean that you cannot pass the infection on to your partner(s).

How NSU develops

NSU is usually caused by a sexual infection. Although rarely it can result from:

• an allergic reaction, such as to bubble baths or washing powders or other chemicals
• a non sexually transmitted infection such as cystitis

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Where to go for help

- Your local NHS sexual health (GUM) clinic. You can find details of your nearest NHS sexual health clinic in the phone book under genito-urinary medicine (GUM), sexually transmitted diseases (STD) or venereal diseases (VD). Or phone your local hospital and ask for the 'special' or GUM clinic. Or check the web site (www.playingsafely.co.uk) for a directory of GUM clinics in the UK. You will get free, confidential advice and treatment. You can go to any clinic anywhere in the country – you don’t have to go to a local one – and you don’t have to be referred by your GP. (Non-NHS sexual health clinics may not always offer the full range of services which are available at NHS sexual health clinics.)

- Your own GP.

Don’t pass urine for at least 2 hours before attending the clinic or doctor’s surgery.

The tests for NSU

- A physical examination of your genital area by a doctor or nurse.

- Samples are taken, using a cotton-wool or spongy swab, from the penis or urethra.

- A sample of urine is taken.

None of these tests should be painful, but they may be uncomfortable.

Diagnosis and treatment

Samples taken during the examination are looked at under a microscope to check for infection. In most clinics, the result is available at the time of the first visit. A second sample is sent to a laboratory for testing to determine the cause of the NSU. The result is usually available within one week.

Treatment is easy. You will be given antibiotic tablets. If you are allergic to any antibiotics, it is important that you tell your doctor.

It is important that you finish any course of treatment. If treatment is interrupted, it may be necessary to start again from the beginning.

Your partner should also attend the clinic for a check-up.

Follow-up

It is important to return for a check-up after you have completed the treatment to ensure that the infection has gone.

You should not have penetrative sex (when the penis enters the vagina, mouth or anus), not even with a condom, until you have returned to the clinic and been given the all-clear by the doctor.

Complications

- inflammation of the testicles

- reduced fertility

- NSU may recur. A recurrence may be triggered by excessive friction during sex or masturbation, or by excessive alcohol consumption

Serious complications however are rare.

- NSU may also recur if you are exposed again to an infection or could be due to a number of non infectious on non STI related problems

- Reiter's syndrome is where there is inflammation of the eyes, joints or urethra, and can be another reason for the return of an NSU

Remember, after treatment, using condoms during sex can reduce your risk of getting or passing on sexually transmitted infections.

(continued overleaf)