

Factsheet



Health

Donovanosis fact sheet

Donovanosis is a sexually transmissible, genital ulcer disease which can cause chronic infection and genital scarring if left untreated. Antibiotics can readily cure donovanosis.

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What is the donovanosis?

Donovanosis is a sexually transmissible genital ulcer disease. The bacterium that causes donovanosis (*Klebsiella granulomatis*) infects the skin around the genitals, groin or anal area and causes ulcers and destruction of the skin. Donovanosis is a known risk factor for the transmission of HIV; however, the disease is readily cured with antibiotics.

What are the symptoms?

After infection, one or more initially painless ulcers (sores) or lumps develop on the genitals, or around the anus or mouth. Without treatment the ulcers will increase in size and can form a raised red fleshy lump that progressively destroys normal skin. Other bacteria can infect these sores, causing them to become painful and distressing with an unpleasant smell.

How is it spread?

Donovanosis is spread by sexual contact. Symptoms generally appear from 1-4 weeks after infection but occasionally may take as long as a year to develop. A very small proportion of people may be infected through direct, nonsexual contact (skin-to-skin contact).

Who is at risk?

In Australia, donovanosis is almost unknown outside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population living in remote communities of northern Australia, where small numbers of cases have occurred in recent years. Others at risk of donovanosis are people who have sex with someone from a country with high rates of donovanosis (tropical and sub-tropical areas of the world, particularly Papua New Guinea, areas of central America, southern Africa and southern India).

How is it prevented?

- Avoid sex with someone who has a visible genital ulcer or sore.
- Using condoms for vaginal and anal sex significantly reduces the risk of donovanosis and other sexually transmitted infections.

- If you are planning to visit or live in a developing country, find out about diseases that occur there and how they are best avoided.

How is it diagnosed?

Because there are a number of causes of genital ulcer disease, the doctor, nurse or health worker will take specimens from the ulcer and collect blood to test for donovanosis and other sexually transmitted infections.

How is it treated?

Donovanosis is treated with antibiotics and the ulcers start healing within days. Depending of the length of time since infection and the stage of infection, antibiotics may need to be taken for several weeks. Pain killers may be taken if the ulcers are painful. It is important to complete the course of antibiotics and attend follow-up visits to ensure that the infection has been cured. If donovanosis is not treated, the ulcer will persist and will slowly and progressively get bigger. It can destroy large areas of skin and genital tissues. Cancer of the genitals may be linked with longstanding donovanosis.

What is the public health response?

Your doctor, nurse, health worker or sexual health clinic can help you to decide which of your sexual partners may be at risk and help you to contact them so they can be offered testing. If you wish, your health care provider can make contact for you, while keeping your identity confidential.

Avoid unsafe sex until both you and your partner(s) have treated.

Donovanosis is a notifiable disease in NSW. Doctors and laboratory staff are legally required to notify NSW Health about new cases. Notifications are confidential.

Further information

The information in this fact sheet is general and you should talk to a doctor, health worker, sexual health clinic or contraception clinic if you are worried about sexually transmissible diseases. Contact the **NSW Sexual Health Infoline freecall 1800 451 624**.

For further information please call your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055

Contact page owner: [Communicable Diseases](#)