

A urinary tract infection (UTI) occurs when bacteria grow in the urinary tract. The urinary tract system makes and stores urine and carries it out of the body.

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

The organs that can be infected include:

- ◆ Bladder (common) – Stores urine.
- ◆ Urethra (common) – The tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body.
- ◆ Kidneys – Collect waste from blood to make urine.
- ◆ Ureters – Move urine from the kidneys to the bladder.

How is it spread?

Women get UTIs more often than men. The risk for UTIs can be increased by:

- ◆ Sexual intercourse.
- ◆ Using a diaphragm.

- ◆ Conditions that cause urine to stay in the bladder too long.
- ◆ Problems emptying the bladder completely.
- ◆ Loss of hormones (after menopause).
- ◆ Diabetes.
- ◆ Kidney stones.
- ◆ Having a tube that drains urine from the bladder.
- ◆ Obesity.
- ◆ Having had several children.

UTIs cannot be spread between people.



What are signs of UTIs in women?

UTIs in the bladder and urethra may cause:

- ◆ Frequent urge to urinate, but not much urine comes out.
- ◆ Burning, stinging or pain with urination.
- ◆ Heavy feeling in the lower belly.
- ◆ Waking in the night to urinate.

Other signs of UTI may include:

- ◆ Pain or pressure in the lower back or sides.
- ◆ Urine that smells bad or looks dark, cloudy, or red.
- ◆ Tiredness, fever, and chills.

How do you know if you have a UTI?

A health care provider can examine you for UTIs. A urine sample will be tested. Other tests may be done if your provider thinks the infection has spread, or if you have had many UTIs. You may be asked about:

- ◆ Signs of your UTI.
- ◆ Past UTIs.
- ◆ Sexual contact.
- ◆ Birth control methods.
- ◆ Pregnancy.
- ◆ Other health conditions, such as diabetes.

How is it treated?

UTIs are treated and cured with antibiotics. Always finish antibiotic treatment. If treated quickly, UTIs usually do not cause serious problems. You may need longer treatment or a different antibiotic if you:

- ◆ Are pregnant.
- ◆ Have frequent UTIs.
- ◆ Have diabetes.
- ◆ Have a UTI that has spread to your kidneys.

UTIs in the bladder and urethra that are not treated can spread to the kidneys and cause serious illness.

If you have a UTI:

- ◆ Always finish antibiotic treatment.
- ◆ Return to your health care provider if:
 - Signs don't go away.
 - Signs come back.
 - Signs get worse.
 - You have more or different signs of UTI.

Some doctors suggest showers instead of baths, and sanitary pads instead of tampons.

How can you avoid UTIs?

- ◆ Urinate when you have the urge.
- ◆ Don't hold in urine for a long time.
- ◆ Urinate before and after having sex.
- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ◆ Clean your genital area every day.
- ◆ Avoid the use of douches and perfumed sprays for the genital area.

What about pregnancy?

It is important to notify your health care provider right away if you are pregnant and think you may have a UTI. In pregnant women, UTIs:

- ◆ May result in early labor or early birth.
- ◆ May cause harm to the baby, or even death.
- ◆ Are more likely to spread to the kidneys.

For more on UTIs see:

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK/NIH):

Urinary Tract Infections in Adults

www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov/kudiseases/pubs/utiadult/

U.S. National Library of Medicine:

Urinary tract infection – adults

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000521.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health:

Urinary tract infection fact sheet

www.womenshealth.gov/faq/urinary-tract-infection.cfm