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Increase in drug resistant gonorrhoea reported in UK travellers

Travelling abroad? Be aware of your risk of sexually transmitted infections and protect yourself for a safe and enjoyable trip

A rise in cases of a difficult to treat, drug resistant [sexually transmitted infection](#) (STI), [gonorrhoea](#) has been reported in United Kingdom (UK) travellers who visited popular tourist destinations in the Asia-Pacific region [1-3] where extensively drug resistance gonorrhoea is more common. Countries included Cambodia, China, Thailand and Vietnam [2, 3]. Drug resistant gonorrhoea infections have also been reported in UK residents who visited mainland Europe [2].

Reports of hard to treat, drug resistant gonorrhoea in UK travellers are not new [4], but although numbers are still low, cases are now being reported more often [1]. Gonorrhoea is the second most common bacterial STI in the UK [5] and while most infections can be treated successfully, increased drug resistance means gonorrhoea could become an "untreatable" infection [1, 6].

Travel is a great opportunity to explore new experiences and new sexual partnerships can play a part in this. Given the risk of extensively drug resistant gonorrhoea, protecting yourself against STIs is more important than ever. STIs can be a serious risk to your health, so practising [safer sex](#) is just as important as applying insect repellent or sunscreen on holiday [3].

Advice for travellers

Before you travel

Make sure you are up to date for all UK recommended vaccines, including if appropriate [hepatitis B](#) and [human papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#) vaccines.

Check travel vaccine recommendations and health advice, including [mpox](#) guidance, for your destination using our [Country Information](#) pages.

See Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [foreign travel advice](#) for safety and security information.

Pack a good supply of [European CE mark or UKCA mark BSI condoms](#).

While you are away

- Carry condoms and always use them consistently and correctly with all new or casual partners.
- Avoid sexual contact if you notice any [symptoms](#) of an STI.
- If you are travelling long term and experience symptoms or have condomless sex, get medical help locally.
- Travellers in mainland Europe can check here for local services: [European Test Finder](#).

When you return

If you had condomless sex abroad or think you might have an STI, even if you don't have any symptoms, get tested as soon as you return to the UK.

Testing is quick, free and confidential.

Depending on where you live you can:

- order an [STI self-sampling kit](#) online
- visit your [local sexual health clinic](#)

Make sure you get treated quickly if your test results show you've got an STI. Untreated STIs, including gonorrhoea, can lead to serious health problems, including fertility issues, pelvic inflammatory disease and pregnancy complications [3].

Advice for health professionals

Travellers should be counselled about the risk of STIs during international travel, and in particular, the risk of resistant gonorrhoea in the Asia-Pacific region.

Health professionals are reminded to refer all suspected cases of gonorrhoea to sexual health services for appropriate management. Sexual health care pathways should enable prompt diagnosis, culture for susceptibility testing, effective treatment, test of cure, partner notification and a full STI screen [7].

Clinical laboratories should continue to refer *N. gonorrhoeae* isolates with resistance to ceftriaxone to the Sexually Transmitted Infections Reference Laboratory, [UK Health Security Agency Bacteriology Reference Department \(BRD\)](#).

Resources

- [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: STIs in Europe - A problem hiding under the duvet](#)
- [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: European Test Finder](#)
- [NHS: Sex activities and risk](#)
- [NHS Scotland: Online Booking for Sexual Health](#)
- [NHS Wales: Safer sex on holiday](#)
- [NHS: Visiting a sexual health clinic](#)
- [Northern Ireland Public Health Agency: Explore Sexual Health NI](#)
- [Terence Higgins Trust: Sexual health](#)

References

1. [UK Health Security Agency. Antibiotic-resistant gonorrhoea cases rising in England. 27 March 2025. \[Accessed 1 May 2025\]](#)
2. [Fifer H, Doumith M, Rubinstein L et al. Ceftriaxone-resistant *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* detected in England, 2015-24: an observational analysis. J Antimicrob Chemother. 2024 Dec 2;79\(12\):3332-3339. \[Accessed 1 May 2025\]](#)
3. [UK Health Security Agency. Travel health and the growing risk of antibiotic-resistant STIs like gonorrhoea. 28 March 2025. \[Accessed 17 April 2025\]](#)
4. [Public Health England \(now part of UK Health Security Agency\). UK case of *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* with high-level resistance to azithromycin and resistance to ceftriaxone acquired abroad. Health Protection Report Advanced Access Report 12: 11: 29 March 2018. \[Accessed 1 May 2025\]](#)
5. [UK Health Security Agency. Gonorrhoea: guidance, data and analysis. Last updated 6 September 2024. \[Accessed 1 May 2025\]](#)

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6. [Iacobucci G. Gonorrhoea: Rise of antibiotic resistant cases in England prompts call for use of condoms and tests. BMJ 2025;388:r622. 27 March 2025. \[Accessed 1 May 2025\]](#)
7. [Public Health England \(now part of UK Health Security Agency\). Guidance for the detection of gonorrhoea in England. Last updated March 2021. \[Accessed 1 May 2025\]](#)