

# PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY



SPOR Evidence Alliance

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Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research

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## Evidence Review for the Development of Recommendations on the Treatment of Uncomplicated Gonococcal Infection

Date prepared: July 09, 2025.

### Summary

Canada's Drug Agency (CDA) reviewed current treatment guidelines for uncomplicated gonorrhea infections to find gaps in the research. This review identified and analyzed 19 treatment guidelines and 1 systematic review. Most treatment guidelines recommended combination therapy with ceftriaxone and azithromycin. However, there was a lack of data that compared the efficacy and safety of various antibiotics for treating gonorrhea infections.

### What does this mean?

This lack of data shows the need for better research, such as a high quality systematic review with meta-analysis or a series of focused reviews to create updated and trustworthy treatment guidelines for uncomplicated gonorrhea infections.

**Citation:** Dourka J, Lunny C, Konstantinidis M, Tricco AC. Evidence Review for the Development of Recommendations on the Treatment of Uncomplicated Gonococcal Infection – Part 1. Submitted to CDA, July, 2023. <https://www.cda-amc.ca/evidence-review-treatment-options-uncomplicated-gonococcal-infections>

**For more information, please contact Dr. Andrea Tricco**  
([andrea.tricco@unityhealth.to](mailto:andrea.tricco@unityhealth.to))

### What is the current situation?

Gonorrhea is the second most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in Canada, caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* and is treated with antibiotics. However, treating gonorrhea has become more difficult because that bacteria are becoming resistant to some antibiotics.

### What questions did we aim to answer in our research?

The goal of this review was to find out if there are any gaps or outdated information on the current treatment recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). This was done by answering eight specific research questions.

### How did we approach these questions?

The research team searched for studies published after January 2020 in several medical databases. They also searched other sources of information, also known as grey literature, on April 27, 2023. One reviewer screened all the sources to decide which to include. One reviewer also collected data and assessed the quality of the systematic review using a tool called AMSTAR-2. Additional documents were found through PHAC's unpublished research from September 2020 and February 2022.

### What answers did we find from our research?

The search found 361 unique studies and 36 grey literature sources. After screening, 6 treatment guidelines and 1 systematic review were included. The review also included 13 additional guidelines from PHAC's unpublished research. Treatment recommendations varied across the included guidelines—some guidelines recommend using ceftriaxone alone, while others suggest combining it with azithromycin. The included systematic review also suggested that ceftriaxone can be used to treat throat infections. However, this may not be applicable to other types of infection, such as genital or anal infections.

### How confident are we in these findings?

Since many guidelines lacked clear methods and the systematic review had limitations, making it difficult to judge the reliability of the recommendations. More high-quality research is needed to provide stronger evidence and support the development of updated and reliable treatment recommendations.