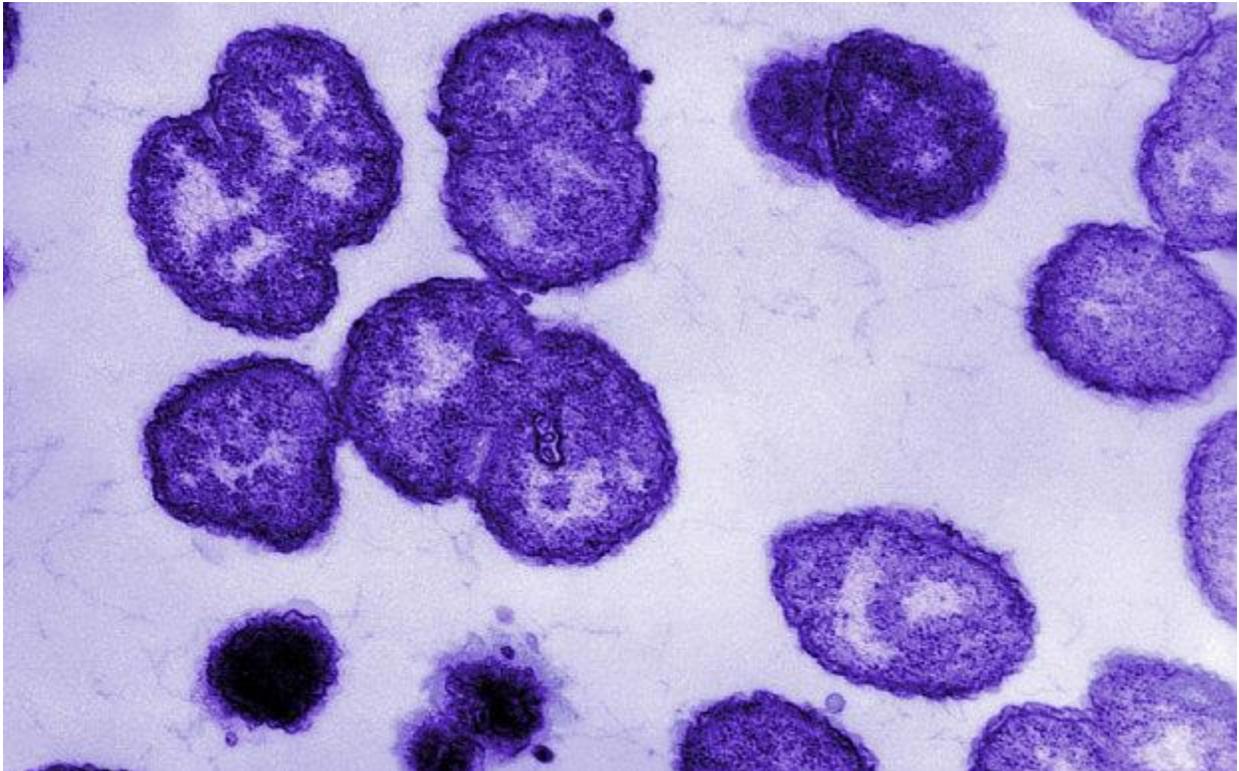


'Super-gonorrhoea' outbreak across north of England sparks national alert

Public Health England 'concerned' about drug-resistant strain first reported in Leeds but which has spread to Macclesfield, Oldham and Scunthorpe



Electron micrograph of *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* Photo: Alamy

Telegraph

By Agency, 7:35AM BST 18 Sep 2015

An outbreak of highly drug-resistant gonorrhoea has been detected in the north of England, triggering a national alert.

Fifteen cases have been detected by Public Health England (PHE) so far, the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV said.

Reports to PHE's sexually transmitted bacteria reference unit (STBRU) of cases of the infection being highly resistant to the azithromycin drug have previously been rare, it added.



Neisseria gonorrhoeae, the bacterium responsible for the sexually transmitted infection gonorrhea. Photo: The Science Picture Company / Alamy

The outbreak, which was first detected in Leeds in March, has since spread - with cases reported in patients from Macclesfield, Oldham and Scunthorpe.

All of the cases involve heterosexual patients, and some people have reported partners from other parts of England.

Around 10 per cent of men and almost half of women with gonorrhoea do not experience symptoms - meaning the condition can go untreated for some time.

What are the symptoms of gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea symptoms usually develop within about two weeks of infection - but sometimes do not appear for several months

In women, symptoms can include:

- pain or a burning sensation when passing urine

- an unusual vaginal discharge, which may be thin or watery and green or yellow in colour

pain or tenderness in the lower abdominal area (this is less common)

bleeding between periods, heavier periods and bleeding after sex (this is less common)

In men, symptoms can include:

pain or a burning sensation when urinating

an unusual discharge from the tip of the penis, which may be white, yellow or green

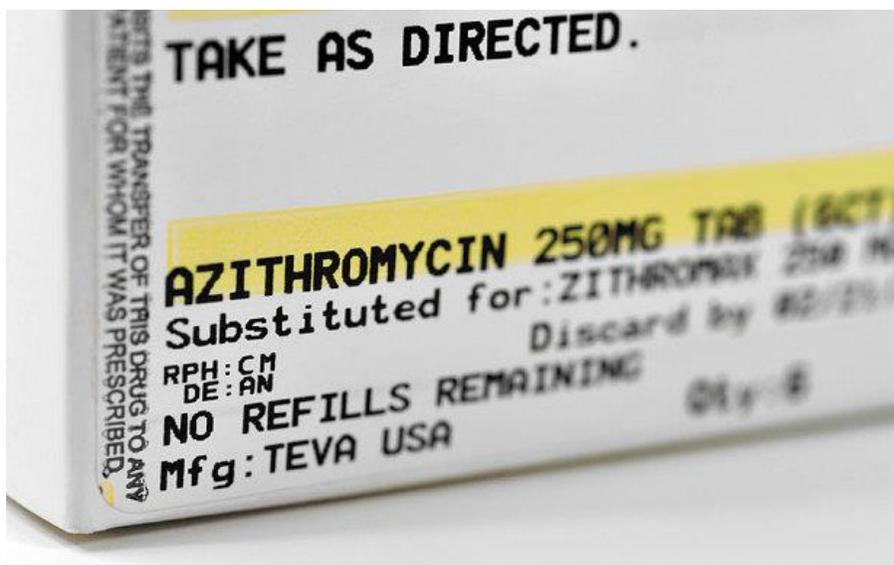
inflammation (swelling) of the foreskin

pain or tenderness in the testicles (this is rare)

Source: NHS

In a statement, PHE said: "An outbreak control team meeting has been convened and STBRU are currently performing next generation sequencing on these strains to better understand the molecular epidemiology."

It added: "PHE is concerned that the effectiveness of current front-line dual therapy for gonorrhoea will be threatened if this resistant strain continues to spread unchecked."



Azithromycin tablets Photo: Alamy

The number of infections detected may seem small, Peter Greenhouse, a consultant in sexual health based in Bristol said, but added there could be more undetected cases.

"This azithromycin highly-resistant outbreak is the first one that has triggered a national alert," he told the BBC.

The implication is there's a lot more of this strain out there and we need to stamp it out as quickly as possible...'

- sexual health consultant Peter Greenhouse

"It doesn't sound like an awful lot of people, but the implication is there's a lot more of this strain out there and we need to stamp it out as quickly as possible.

"If this becomes the predominant strain in the UK we're in big trouble, so we have to be really meticulous in making sure each of these individuals has all their contacts traced and treated."

There were almost 35,000 cases of gonorrhoea reported in England last year - it is the second most common bacterial sexually transmitted infection in the UK after chlamydia. **The majority of cases affect people under the age of 25.**

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