

## DDD PREVENTION BULLETIN | URINARY TRACT INFECTION



A **Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)** happens when bacteria, often from the skin or rectum, enter the urethra (a tube where urine leaves the body from the bladder) and infect the urinary tract. The urinary tract includes the kidneys, ureters, bladder, and urethra. The infection can affect several parts of the urinary tract, but the most common type is a bladder infection (cystitis). Kidney infections (pyelonephritis) are another type of UTI. They are less common but are more serious than bladder infections.

### **Risk Factors and Causes:**

- Adults over 50
- Dehydration
- Poor hygiene
- Urinary catheters
- Sexual Activity
- Suppressed immune system
- Use of incontinence products
- Structural problems within the urinary system



### **Signs and Symptoms:**

- Frequent urination
- Strong smelling urine
- Bloody and/or cloudy urine
- Pain or burning while urinating
- Feeling the need to urinate despite having an empty bladder
- Avoiding urination
- New onset of incontinence
- Crying during or right after urination
- Sudden behavior changes or confusion
- Increased touching or itching of the genital area



Kidney Infection symptoms may be different and include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Nausea and vomiting
- Lower back pain or pain in the side of back

## Behaviors and UTIs in I/DD Population:

- Individuals with an intellectual disability tend to be at a higher risk for UTIs when compared to other cohorts.
- These individuals often have difficulties with expressing their wants and needs effectively, which includes difficulty when expressing that they are experiencing physical distress.
- Due to the painful nature of a UTI, and difficulties with communication, an individual may engage in challenging behaviors such as aggression, property destruction, or self-injurious behavior.
- These behaviors may serve as a means to communicate their discomfort or as a means of pain attenuation.
- When an individual engages in new challenging behaviors, or elevated levels of challenging behaviors, it is important that potential medical causal conditions such as UTIs are examined.



## When to Seek Medical Attention:

- If there is the presence of a fever
- If symptoms are severe or getting worse
- If symptoms don't improve after a few days
- If symptoms of a kidney infection are present
- Three or more urinary tract infections in 12 months

## Prevention:

- Stay well hydrated—drinking water and fluids helps dilute the urine and urinating more often allowing bacteria to be flushed from the urinary tract before an infection can begin.
- Urinate after sexual activity
- Take showers instead of baths
- Wipe front to back to prevent the spread of bacteria from the anus to the vagina and urethra
- Keep the genital area clean and dry
- Frequently change incontinence products or clothing if soiled



## Complications:

- Repeated infections
- Permanent kidney damage
- Urethral narrowing in men
- Sepsis