



CHLAMYDIA

What is Chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*, which can damage a woman's reproductive organs. Even though symptoms of chlamydia are usually mild or absent, serious complications that cause irreversible damage, including infertility, can occur silently before a woman ever recognizes a problem. Chlamydia also can cause discharge from the penis of an infected man.

How do people get chlamydia?

Chlamydia can be transmitted during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her newborn during vaginal childbirth.

What are the signs and symptoms of chlamydia?

Chlamydia is known as a 'silent' infection because most infected people have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they may not appear until several weeks after exposure. Even when it causes no symptoms, chlamydia can damage a woman's reproductive organs.

In women, the bacteria first infect the cervix and/or the urethra. Some infected women have an abnormal vaginal discharge or a burning sensation when urinating. Untreated infections can spread upward to the uterus and fallopian tubes, causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can be silent, or can cause symptoms such as abdominal and pelvic pain. Even if PID causes no symptoms initially, it can lead to infertility and other complications later on.

Some infected men have discharge from their penis or a burning sensation when urinating. Pain and swelling in one or both testicles (known as "epididymitis") may also occur, but is less common.

Chlamydia can also infect the rectum in men and women, either through receptive anal sex, or possibly via spread from the cervix and vagina. While these infections often cause no symptoms, they can cause rectal pain, discharge, and/or bleeding (known as "proctitis").

How is chlamydia diagnosed?

There are laboratory tests to diagnose chlamydia. Some can be performed on urine, other tests require that a specimen be collected from a site such as the penis or cervix.

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How is chlamydia treated?

Chlamydia can be easily treated and cured with antibiotics. A single dose of azithromycin or a week of doxycycline (twice daily) are the most commonly used treatments. All sex partners should be evaluated, tested, and treated. Persons with chlamydia should abstain from sexual intercourse until they and their sex partners have completed treatment, otherwise re-infection is possible. Women whose sex partners have not been appropriately treated are at high risk for re-infection. Having multiple infections increases a woman's risk of serious reproductive health complications, including infertility.

Who is at risk for chlamydia?

Sexually active men and women can be exposed to chlamydia during sexual contact with an infected person. The greater the number of sex partners, the greater the risk of infection.

Because the cervix (opening to the uterus) of teenage girls and young women is not fully matured, they are at particularly high risk for infection if sexually active. Since chlamydia can be transmitted by oral or anal sex, men who have sex with men are also at risk for chlamydial infection.

What complications can result from untreated chlamydia?

In women, untreated infection can spread into the uterus or fallopian tubes and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). This happens in up to 40 percent of women with untreated chlamydia. PID can cause permanent damage to the fallopian tubes, uterus, and surrounding tissues. The damage can lead to chronic pelvic pain, infertility, and potentially fatal ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus). Women infected with chlamydia are up to five times more likely to become infected with HIV, if exposed.

In pregnant women, chlamydia infections may cause premature delivery. Babies born to infected mothers can get chlamydial infections in their eyes and respiratory tracts. Chlamydia is a leading cause of early infant pneumonia and conjunctivitis (pinkeye) in newborns.

Untreated chlamydia in men typically causes urethral infection. Infection sometimes spreads to the epididymis (a tube that carries sperm from the testes), causing pain, fever and infertility.

How can chlamydia be prevented?

The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual contact, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Latex or polyurethane male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of chlamydia.

For more information: Call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-800-232-4636, TTY: 1-888-232-6348 in English and Spanish.

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