

Fact Sheet

CHLAMYDIA

What is it?

Chlamydia is the most common reportable Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI). It is caused by a bacterium called *Chlamydia trachomatis*.

How is it spread?

You can get chlamydia from unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected person. It can take 2 to 6 weeks or longer for symptoms to appear. Sometimes, you can get chlamydia in the eyes from contact with your hands or direct contact with infected fluids. An infected mother can also pass it to her baby during delivery. An infected person can pass it on at any time until he or she is properly treated. Untreated chlamydia can live in the body for months or years.

What are the symptoms?

More than 75% of women and 50% of men infected with chlamydia have no symptoms. They can pass the infection on to their sexual partner(s) without knowing.

Women with symptoms may have increased vaginal discharge or irritation. Other symptoms may include pain during urination, bleeding during or after sexual intercourse, pain in the lower abdomen or pain during sexual intercourse.

Men may have discharge and itching around the urethra (opening in the penis). They may also have burning when they urinate, or pain and swelling in the testicles. These symptoms may come and go.

How is it diagnosed?

A health professional can test women for chlamydia by taking a sample of fluid from the cervix. The cervix is the opening to the womb (uterus). In some cases, they use a urine test to check for chlamydia in women. For men, it's usually a urine test. People should not urinate for 1 hour before this test. In some cases, they may take a sample of discharge from a man's urethra. Sometimes they also test the throat or rectum for the infection.

What are the complications?

Untreated chlamydia in women may lead to a condition called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). It is a serious infection of the lining of the uterus (womb), the fallopian tubes and the ovaries. Some women will have long-term pelvic pain. Sometimes, if a woman has PID, her fallopian tubes become blocked by scar tissue. In this case, sperm may not be able to fertilize an ovum (egg). She will not be able to get pregnant. If the fallopian tubes are only partly blocked so that sperm can pass

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through, she may develop a pregnancy inside a fallopian tube. This is called an ectopic (tubal) pregnancy, which can be very dangerous. A pregnant woman with untreated chlamydia may have a miscarriage. If she gives birth without being treated, her baby may become ill with pneumonia or eye infections. A man who has chlamydia and goes untreated may have swelling and pain in his testicles. This condition is called epididymitis. Lack of treatment may also cause the tubes that carry the sperm may get blocked by scar tissue, causing sterility.

How is it treated?

Chlamydia is treated with antibiotic pills. Some of the commonly used antibiotics include Azithromycin, Doxycycline, Erythromycin and Amoxicillin. It is important for a person diagnosed with chlamydia and their partner(s) to take all their medication as directed by their doctor or clinic. Even if the symptoms have disappeared, it is important to take all the pills to make sure that the infection is cured. Do not have sex while you and your partner(s) are on the medication and for seven days after you finish it, even with a condom.

What about the sexual partners?

It is important to inform all of your sexual partners within the past 60 days so that they can be tested. If a person with chlamydia has not had sex in the past 3 months, then their last sexual partner should be tested and treated. Any sexual partners need to be told that having no symptoms does not mean there is no infection. If you do not want to tell your partners, a public health nurse can notify them for you. They will not give your name.

Is follow-up important?

In some cases, the doctor will advise a follow-up test to make sure the infection is cured. This follow-up test should be done 4 weeks after you have finished taking all your pills.

Remember:

- Take all medication as prescribed by the doctor or clinic.
- Avoid sex for 7 days after you and your sexual partner(s) have completed treatment. A person can get re-infected every time they have sex with an untreated partner.
- If you have an untreated STI like chlamydia, it is easier to get HIV from a person who has it.
- Use condoms to lower the chance of getting STIs.
- It is possible to have more than one infection at a time, so it is important to be tested for other STIs.

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