

## Chlamydia

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**What is Chlamydia?** Chlamydia is the most commonly reported STD. It is caused by a bacteria, which can infect the vagina, cervix, rectum, penis, urethra or throat. Chlamydia can be easily cured, but because it usually has no signs or symptoms, many people don't realize they are infected.

### **How many people get Chlamydia?**

In the United States, about 3 million people are infected with Chlamydia each year. Chlamydia is most common in people under 25 years of age. Because the cervix is not fully developed, young women are at higher risk of getting Chlamydia than young men.

**How is Chlamydia transmitted?** Chlamydia is spread through unprotected vaginal and anal sex with an infected partner – even if that person has no symptoms.

Ejaculation does not have to happen to get Chlamydia. The risk from oral sex is lower. It can also be passed from mother to baby during birth.

**What are the symptoms?** Most women and many men never notice symptoms. If symptoms occur, they usually show up 1 - 3 weeks after infection. The most common symptoms are:

#### **Women**

- Abnormal vaginal discharge.
- Pain or burning while urinating.
- Bleeding between periods or after sex.
- Pain during sex.
- Stomach pain.

#### **Men**

- Discharge from penis.
- Itching inside penis.
- Pain or burning while urinating.
- Painful, swollen testicle.

If Chlamydia is in the rectum, there may be few or no symptoms. Some people feel itching or pain in the rectum.

**What happens if I have Chlamydia?** Chlamydia infection makes it easier to get HIV and other STDs and to pass them to sex partners. Without treatment, Chlamydia may spread inside the body. There, it can cause *pelvic inflammatory disease* (PID) in women and *epididymitis* in men, two very serious illnesses.

- **Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)** can develop if gonorrhea spreads to the uterus and fallopian tubes. PID can result in chronic pelvic pain, infertility, or tubal pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus). Symptoms of PID include pain in the lower abdomen or back, fever, spotting or bleeding between menstrual

periods, pain during sex, and increased vaginal discharge.

- **Epididymitis** results when untreated infections in men spread into the testicles. This leads to pain or swelling in the scrotal area, which is a sign of inflammation of a part of the testicle called the epididymis. Epididymitis is often painful and, if it involves both testicles, can lead to infertility.

If Chlamydia gets into the eyes, it can cause an eye infection called conjunctivitis (pink eye).

**How do I avoid getting Chlamydia?** The only sure way to avoid Chlamydia and other STDs is to not have sex (abstinence). If you do have sex:

- Talk with your partner(s) about Chlamydia and other STDs. Work out a plan to reduce risks that both can agree on.
- Use male or female condoms the right way and every time you have sex.
- Don't have sex if you notice any unusual discharge from your partner's penis, vagina, or anus.
- Have sex with only one partner who has sex only with you (mutual monogamy).
- Have sex with fewer people. More partners = more risk.

No method of birth control, except condoms, protects you against any STD. If you think you might have Chlamydia (or any STD), seek care at a local health care provider or clinic. If you have Chlamydia, tell all of your sex partners so they can get treated too.

**How do I find out if I have Chlamydia?** The only way to be sure is to get tested. The test is easy – either a urine sample or a fluid sample from the penis, vagina, cervix, or rectum is taken and sent to a lab. Many healthcare providers do not test for Chlamydia unless you ask. Getting a pap smear doesn't mean you have been tested for Chlamydia or any other STD.

**How is Chlamydia treated?** Chlamydia can be easily treated with antibiotics. Because Chlamydia and gonorrhea often occur together, people with Chlamydia may be treated for both diseases at the same time. Not all antibiotics work against Chlamydia, so your provider will suggest the best one for you.

**Important information about treatment**

- Take all of the medicine prescribed, even if symptoms go away.
- Never treat yourself with old, leftover antibiotics or other pills from home.
- Do not split your own medication with your partners. Some health care providers will give extra medication to take home to your partners.
- Make sure your sex partners get treated too so you don't get infected again.
- Don't douche or use an enema.
- Don't have sex until your provider says you and your partner(s) are cured.

You should not have sex for 7 days after treatment. Recent or regular sex partners must also be treated before having sex again or they may re-infect each other. Everyone should get tested again 3 months after treatment to be sure they have not been re-infected since treatment.

**How does Chlamydia affect pregnancy?** Chlamydia can cause a pregnant woman to go into labor early or deliver a low-birthweight baby. Chlamydia can spread from mother to baby during birth. This can cause pneumonia or a serious infection in the baby's eye that may lead to blindness. A pregnant woman can be treated to prevent transmission to the baby. All pregnant women should be tested for Chlamydia, even if they don't seem to be at risk.

### **For more help**

- Washington State HIV/HEPC/STD hotline: (800) 272-AIDS (2437) - Testing and treatment resources and information.
- ASHA STI Resource Center: (919) 361-8488 - STI/STD information.
- Centers for Disease Control National STD/HIV Hotline: (800) CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) Spanish (800) 344-7432, TTY (800) 243-7889 - General information on many health topics including STDs and HIV.

### **More information**

- [American Social Health Association Chlamydia information](#)
- [Chlamydia fact sheet](#) (Centers for Disease Control)
- [Chlamydia information](#) (Planned Parenthood)

