



FACT SHEET

CHLAMYDIA

What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*.

How common is chlamydia?

An estimated 3 million Americans are infected with chlamydia each year. Women are frequently re-infected if their sex partners are not treated.

How do people get chlamydia?

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

Any sexually active person can be infected with chlamydia. The greater the number of sex partners, the greater the risk of infection.

What are the symptoms of chlamydia?

Chlamydia is known as a “silent” disease, because up to 70% of women and up to 25% of men do not have symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1 - 3 weeks after exposure.

Women with symptoms might have an abnormal vaginal discharge, or a burning sensation when urinating (peeing). As the infection progresses, some women may still have no signs or symptoms; others have lower abdominal pain, low back pain, nausea, fever, and pain during intercourse, or bleeding between menstrual periods.

Men’s signs and symptoms may include a discharge from the penis or a burning sensation when urinating, burning and itching around the opening of the penis, and occasionally, pain and swelling in the testicles.

Men or women who have anal intercourse may acquire chlamydial infection in the rectum, which can cause rectal pain, discharge, or bleeding.

Chlamydia can be found in the throats of males and females having oral sex with an infected partner.

What complications can result from untreated chlamydia?

Untreated infections can progress to serious reproductive and other health problems with both short-term and long-term results.

In women, untreated infection can spread into the uterus or fallopian tubes and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). 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 (outside the uterus) pregnancy. Women infected with chlamydia are at increased risk for HIV infection if exposed.

Complications among men are rare. Infection sometimes spreads to the epididymis (the tube that carries sperm from the testis), causing pain, fever, and, sometimes, sterility.

How does chlamydia affect a pregnant woman and her baby?

There is some evidence that untreated infections can lead to premature delivery. Babies who are born to infected mothers can get chlamydia infections in their eyes and respiratory tracts. Chlamydia is a leading cause of early infant pneumonia and conjunctivitis (eye infection) in newborns.

How is chlamydia diagnosed?

There are laboratory tests to diagnose chlamydia. A discussion about risk factors will help your doctor decide whether you should be tested.

What is the treatment for chlamydia?

Chlamydia can be treated and cured with antibiotics. All sex partners should be evaluated, tested, and treated if necessary. Persons with chlamydia should abstain from sexual intercourse until they and their sex partners have completed treatment, to avoid re-infection.

How can chlamydia be prevented?

The best 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, and is faithful.

Latex male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of chlamydia. Chlamydia screening is recommended annually for all sexually active women 25 years of age and younger. All pregnant women should have a screening test for chlamydia. Women older than 25 years whose sexual practices put them at risk for chlamydia should be tested at least once a year.

Any genital symptoms such as discharge, burning during urination, or unusual sore or rash should be a signal to stop having sex and consult a healthcare provider immediately. A person treated for chlamydia (or any other STD) should notify all recent sex partners so they can seek treatment. This will reduce the risk of sex partners developing serious complications from chlamydia, and reduce the person's risk of becoming re-infected. The person and all of his/her sex partners must avoid sex until they have completed treatment.