

# Chlamydia Infection: What You Need To Know

## What is Chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacteria (germ) called *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Most people have no symptoms so they do not seek health care.

Untreated chlamydia can cause:

- pelvic inflammatory disease
- infertility (being unable to have a baby)
- ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus)
- chronic (long-lasting) pelvic pain.

Having an STI, such as chlamydia, causes changes to the tissue in the genital area. It can put you at a higher risk of getting HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) if your sexual partner is HIV-positive.

Chlamydia is the most commonly reported bacterial STI in the United States. It affects more women than men.

## Who Can Get Chlamydia?

Anyone having sexual contact (through sexual intercourse, anal sex and oral sex) can become infected. People most at risk include:

- adolescents (teens) and young adults
- anyone who has an STI
- anyone with a sex partner who has an STI
- anyone who has more than one sex partner.

Even if you have one sex partner, you should be screened. You or your partner's body can store the germ for years and spread it at any time.

Chlamydia can also be spread at birth from an infected mother to baby.

## How is Chlamydia Found?

Your health care provider can test you for chlamydia by having you take a urine test (urinalysis).

They can also test you for chlamydia by taking a small sample of cells from your cervix.

You should receive your results within 2 weeks.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention recommends that women\* be tested once a year who are:

- younger than age 25 who are sexually active
- age 25 or older who have many sexual partners
- age 25 or older who have a sex partner who has many partners
- age 25 or older who have a new sexual partner
- pregnant.

The CDC recommends that men\*\* be tested once a year who:

- have sex with other men (gay or bisexual)
- have HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).

You should see a doctor if your partner has chlamydia or symptoms that could be chlamydia.

\*Born female. \*\*Born male.

(over)

## What are the Symptoms of Chlamydia?

- Women can get chlamydia in the cervix (opening to the womb), rectum or throat. Often, there are no symptoms. You may have:
  - unusual discharge from your vagina with a strong smell
  - discomfort when you urinate and when you have sex
  - irritation or itching around your genitals
  - pelvic pain.
- Men can get chlamydia in the urethra (inside the penis), rectum or throat. Often, there are no symptoms. You may have:
  - discharge from your penis
  - burning when you urinate
  - burning or itching around the opening of your penis.

## How is Chlamydia Treated?

Chlamydia is easy to cure when treated. Your health care provider will give you a prescription for an antibiotic. Take the medicine as directed.

Do not stop taking the medicine even if you feel better. If you stop taking it, the chlamydia bacteria will not be killed.

You should not have sex again until you and your sex partner(s) have completed treatment.

- If your doctor prescribes a single dose of medicine, you should wait 7 days before having sex.
- If your doctor prescribes a medicine for you to take for 7 days, you should wait until you have taken all of the medicine before having sex.

## How Long can the Germ be Spread?

A chlamydia infection can last for years if it is not treated. It's important that you call your health care provider if you are in the at-risk group or if you have concerns about your sex partner(s). You can get chlamydia again any time you are exposed — even if you've been treated for it before.

## How is Chlamydia Prevented?

- Have sex with one partner in a committed relationship. This means the two of you only have sex with each other.
- Use a condom (male or female) the right way every time you have sex. This will also help protect you from other STIs. (You can have more than one STI at a time.)
- Do not have any sexual activity until your treatment is done.
- Have your sex partner(s) during the past 3 months tested for chlamydia. Anyone who has chlamydia that goes untreated can keep infecting other sex partners and be at risk for serious side effects.
- You should be retested 3 months after treatment to be sure the treatment was successful.

## Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.