

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. Chlamydia can also pass from an infected pregnant woman to her unborn baby at birth. Chlamydia is curable, but you can get it again if you have sex with an infected person.

What are the symptoms?

At least 70% of infected women and 50% of infected men will not have symptoms and will not know they have it unless they are tested. It can take two to six weeks or longer for symptoms to appear for those who have symptoms.

Women's symptoms can include:

- A new or increase in discharge from the vagina, sometimes with vaginal itchiness
- A burning or painful feeling when you urinate
- Pain where the uterus is (in the lower abdomen), sometimes with fever and chills
- Pain when you have sex
- Vaginal bleeding after sex, or when it is not time for your period
- Pain, bleeding and discharge from the rectum
- Eye infection that will not go away

Men's symptoms can include:

- A watery or milky discharge from the penis that is not semen or urine
- A burning feeling when you urinate
- Burning or itching inside the penis
- Pain or swelling in the testicles
- Rectal pain, bleeding and discharge
- Eye infection that will not go away

How can I get tested for chlamydia?

A woman can be tested for chlamydia and gonorrhea with a urine sample or by swabs of the cervix. A man can be tested for chlamydia and gonorrhea with a urine test or by swabbing the opening of the penis. It is important that the person is not having any bleeding at the time of the urine test and that he or she has not urinated for at least 1-2 hours before giving the sample. A person can be infected with chlamydia and gonorrhea at the same time, so it is important to be tested for both. If a person has only had oral or anal sex with another person, a swab of the throat or rectum can be done.

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What are the complications?

- Chlamydia can cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) of the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries, if not cured quickly enough. PID can cause abdominal pain, fever, and the pain may never go away. When a woman has PID her fallopian tubes can be fully or partially blocked with scar tissue. She may not be able to become pregnant if the sperm cannot get to the egg.
- She may be at a higher risk for a tubal or ectopic pregnancy if the fertilized egg cannot get into the uterus. An ectopic pregnancy can be life-threatening.
- If a man has chlamydia too long, his epididymis and testicles can become infected. Usually, there are no problems after treatment.
- There is an increased chance of becoming infected with HIV or spreading it when you are infected with chlamydia.
- Both men and women can develop a type of arthritis called Reiter's Syndrome because the infection gets into the joints of the body.
- Newborn babies that are infected at birth can have pneumonia, eye infections and may be born early or miscarried.

How is it treated?

Chlamydia is curable with the right antibiotic medication. The Sexual Health Clinic at your local health unit can give medication with a prescription or with a positive test result. It is important to finish all the antibiotics given to you. You should not have sex while you and your partner(s) are on medication, and for seven days after the medication is finished. Some people will be asked to do a repeat test in 3 to 4 weeks. A repeat test is recommended after six months.

What about sexual partners?

The people you had sexual contact with in the last 60 days, or who you last had sex with also need to be tested and treated. These people need to be contacted and informed. This can be done at Public Health, without sharing your name.

How can I avoid becoming infected with chlamydia?

- Abstain from having sex.
- Always use condoms or dental dams.
- Do not share sex toys.
- Limit the number of people you have sex with.
- Ask your partner about his or her sexual history.
- Get tested before having sex with a new partner and ask him or her to be tested.
- Take care if drinking or using drugs, to avoid unplanned casual sexual contact.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 or 1-800-267-2803, ext. 349. | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | hpePublicHealth.ca

References

- Calgary Health Region, Health Information Chlamydia, October 2008.
- Health Canada, It's Your Health Chlamydia, July 2004.
- Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections, 2008.
- Toronto Public Health, Chlamydia, March 2003.

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