

## Chlamydia

*Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacteria Chlamydia trachomatis. An estimated 3 million Americans are diagnosed with chlamydia each year.*

*Chlamydia is a serious disease that can damage a woman's reproductive organs—the uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes. The disease often has only mild or no symptoms. When diagnosed, chlamydia can be easily treated and cured with antibiotic drugs.*

### How do you get chlamydia?

Sexually active women and men can get chlamydia through sexual contact with an infected person during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Because there are often no symptoms, people who are infected may unknowingly pass the bacteria to their sex partners. The more sex partners a person has, the greater the risk of getting infected with chlamydia. Chlamydia often occurs together with gonorrhea, another STI. Gonorrhea and chlamydia have similar symptoms and can have similar complications if not treated.

### What are the symptoms?

Seventy-five percent of infected women and half of infected men have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1 to 3 weeks of exposure. The infection is often not diagnosed or treated until there are complications. If you think you have chlamydia or are concerned about it, both you and your sexual partner should see a health care provider right away.

### Women and Chlamydia

In women, the bacteria first attack the cervix (opening to the uterus, or womb) and the urethra (urine canal). Symptoms, if any, might include an abnormal vaginal discharge, or a burning sensation when urinating. If the infection spreads from the cervix to the uterus and fallopian tubes, some women still have no signs or symptoms. If you do have symptoms, you might experience lower abdominal pain, low back pain, nausea, fever, pain during sex, and bleeding between menstrual periods.

### Complications in Women

In women, the chlamydia bacteria often infect the cells of the cervix. If not treated, the infection can spread into the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID occurs in up to 40 percent of women with untreated chlamydia.

Women who have chlamydia may also be more likely to get HIV, the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) from an infected partner. Chlamydia can cause proctitis (an infection of the lining of the rectum) in persons having anal sex. The bacteria can also be found in the throats of people who have oral sex.

### Men and Chlamydia

Men with symptoms might have a discharge from the penis and a burning sensation when urinating. Men might also have burning and itching around the opening of the penis or pain and swelling in the testicles, or both.

### Complications in Men

Untreated chlamydia in men typically causes infection of the urethra (the tube that carries urine from the body). Infection sometimes spreads to the epididymis (a tube that carries sperm from the testis). This may cause pain, fever, and even infertility.

### Diagnosis

There are two kinds of tests to diagnose chlamydia. One involves getting a sample from an infected site (cervix or penis) to be tested for the bacteria. A urine test can also accurately detect the bacteria. The urine test does not require a pelvic exam or swabbing of the penis. A Pap test is not a test for chlamydia.

### Treatment

Antibiotics are used to treat and cure chlamydia. Once you are treated, chlamydia will not recur unless you are re-infected. For this reason, all recent sexual contacts (partners) must be treated as well, and you should not have

genital intercourse with a partner until both of you have completed the treatment.

If untreated, chlamydia infection can cause serious reproductive and other health problems.

If you have chlamydia:

- Get it treated right away. The quicker you seek treatment, the less likely the STI will cause you severe harm. Having an STI increases your risk for getting infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- Follow your health care provider's orders and finish all the medicine that you are given. Even if the symptoms go away, you still need to finish all of the medicine.
- Avoid having any sexual activity while you are being treated for chlamydia.
- Be sure to tell your sex partners, so they can be treated too.

### **Prevention**

There are things you can do to lower your risk for getting chlamydia:

- The best way to prevent chlamydia or any STI is to practice abstinence (don't have sex).
- Have a sexual relationship with only one partner who doesn't have any STIs. Your risk of getting chlamydia increases with the number of partners you have.
- Practice "safer sex." This means protecting yourself with a condom *every* time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Other methods of birth control don't protect you from STIs.
- For vaginal sex, use a latex male condom or a female polyurethane condom. For anal sex, use a latex male condom. Use only water-based lubricants with male and female condoms.
- For oral sex, use a latex dam. If you don't have a latex dam, you can cut an unlubricated male condom open and place it over the opening to the vagina.
- The biggest reason condoms don't work is because they are not used correctly. Even though it may be embarrassing, if you don't know how to use a male or female condom or a latex dam, talk to your health care provider.
- Don't douche. Douching removes some of the normal bacteria in the vagina that protects you from infection. This can increase your risk for getting chlamydia.
- Learn how to talk with your partner about STIs and using condoms. It's up to you to make sure you are protected.

When you are sexually active, especially if you have more than one partner, get regular exams for STIs. The earlier an STI is found, the easier it is to treat.

### **Test Results and Advice Nurse**

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

### **Appointments**

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

**For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at [www.sa.psu.edu/uhs](http://www.sa.psu.edu/uhs)**

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WH\_MH\_Chlamy\_102704

Approved by Patient Education Committee: 10/27/04

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