

Helping Hand™

Chlamydia

Chlamydia (kla-MID-ee-ah) is a sexually transmitted infection (STI), caused by the bacteria (germ) Chlamydia trachomatis. Sexual intercourse, oral sex or any contact between a man's penis and a woman's vagina, can pass the germ from one person to another. It can also be spread during anal sex. If a pregnant woman has chlamydia, it can be passed to her baby during birth. Chlamydia can cause eye infections or pneumonia in the newborn baby.

Who Can Get Chlamydia

Anyone who is sexually active has a chance of getting chlamydia. Those who have had more than one partner are at greater risk. Most people have no symptoms and do not realize they have the disease. They can give it to others without knowing it.

Why Chlamydia Is Harmful

If chlamydia is not treated, it can be very serious. In females, an infection may spread to the uterus, tubes and ovaries. This may cause long-term pain, problems with pregnancy and may make a woman sterile (unable to have babies). This kind of infection is called PID (pelvic inflammatory disease).

In males, chlamydia can cause an inflammation of the urinary tube (urethra). If it is not treated, it can spread to the tube that carries sperm (epididymis). The infection can make a male sterile (unable to father a child).

Signs of Chlamydia

Chlamydia can be in the body for a long time without any signs. If it does cause symptoms, females may feel some itching and burning in the vaginal area or they may have burning when they urinate. Some have a vaginal discharge, pain or bleeding after sex or between their periods. Females may have pain in the lower belly with fever, chills and vomiting.

If males have any symptoms, they may have painful urination and a watery discharge from the penis.

If You Think You Have Chlamydia

- If you do not have symptoms, but have had sex with someone who has chlamydia, see your health care provider. You will need to be tested for the infection and treated with antibiotics.
- If you have any symptoms of chlamydia, see your health care provider for an exam. There is a test that can be done to see if you have this infection. You will need to be treated with antibiotics.
- Be sure to tell your health care provider if there is any chance you may be pregnant.
- Chlamydia can be cured with antibiotics. For the infection to go away completely, you must TAKE YOUR MEDICINE UNTIL ALL THE MEDICINE IS GONE.
- AVOID SEXUAL CONTACT until one week after all the medicine is gone.
- After you have taken all the medicine, a test should be done in two to three months to be sure you no longer have chlamydia.
- Your partner needs to be treated before you have sexual contact again.

Testing for Chlamydia

Women

- The doctor or nurse practitioner examines the genital area.
- A metal or plastic speculum is used to look inside the vagina. Samples of discharge are taken from the cervix. The samples are examined by the lab for the Chlamydia germ.
- If no symptoms are present, a urine sample may be taken instead of a vaginal sample to test for the Chlamydia germ.

Men

• A urine sample is taken to test for the germ.

Treatment for Partners

You and your partner(s) must be treated and you should wait for one week before having sexual intercourse. The treatment not only protects the sexual partner, it also prevents the person already being treated from getting chlamydia back again.

If you live in the Columbus area, your partner(s) can be treated at the Columbus City Health Department, located at 240 Parsons Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43215. The phone number is (614) 645-7772. If you live outside the Columbus area, call your local health department.

Follow-Up Visits

- You and your partner must BOTH be treated and need to have a follow-up doctor's visit if the symptoms do not go away. You need to come back for ALL follow-up appointments.
- Contact your sex partner(s) so that he or she may receive treatment also.
- You should be tested for chlamydia again in 2 to 3 months.

Preventing Future Infection

Abstinence (not having sex) is the only 100% effective way to prevent chlamydia, other STI's and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS). If you choose to have sex, you can do some things that might help prevent the spread of other STI's:

- Respect yourself and your partner.
- Limit the number of sexual partners. Know your partner and his or her sexual history.
- ALWAYS USE A LATEX CONDOM. Use it correctly. Use it every time you have sex, the whole time you have sex.
- Be prepared. Have another condom available in case the one you are using breaks.
- Avoid mind-altering substances such as alcohol and other drugs. You cannot make good decisions if you are drunk or high.
- Some STI's make it easier for HIV to enter the skin and mucous membranes. If you have an STI, you should consider being tested for HIV.
- If a woman is pregnant and thinks she has chlamydia, she should call her health care provider immediately.
- It is a good idea for sexually active teens to be tested for STI'S at least once a year even if there are no symptoms.

If you have any questions, call the Adolescent Medicine Clinic at (614) 722-2450. For more information, you may also call the National STD Hotline at 1-800-227-8922, 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., Monday through Friday or you can get information at http://www.ashastd.org/sitemap.cfm.