

Infection Prevention and You



Chlamydia: What you need to know

What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia (kluh-MID-ee-uh) is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases (STD) in the United States. This bacterial disease can infect the penis, vagina, anus, urethra, eye, or throat and may result in serious health problems. It is estimated that almost 3 million chlamydia infections occur in the U.S each year. Teens and young adults have the highest rates of infection.

How is chlamydia spread?

Chlamydia is spread by unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex. It can also spread from an infected woman to her baby during birth.

What are the symptoms of chlamydia?

Most people infected with chlamydia have no signs or symptoms of disease and people may not be aware that they have been infected. Chlamydia can lead to severe long-term complications even when it causes no symptoms.

Symptoms in women include:

- vaginal discharge
- abdominal pain
- low-grade fever
- pain or a burning feeling while urinating
- swelling inside the vagina or around the anus
- painful intercourse
- vaginal bleeding after intercourse
- bleeding between periods

Symptoms in men include:

- burning sensation when urinating
- discharge from the penis or rectum
- swollen or tender testicles
- swelling around the anus

How is chlamydia diagnosed?

A doctor can diagnose chlamydia through:

- A swab test, where a fluid sample from an infected site (cervix or penis) is tested for the bacteria
- A urine test, where a urine sample is tested for the bacteria

Pap smears **cannot detect chlamydia.

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Is there any treatment for chlamydia?

Chlamydia can easily be treated with antibiotics if taken right away. Finish all medications your physician prescribes you. If left untreated, chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

When should I contact a medical professional?

Call your healthcare provider if you have symptoms of chlamydia, or you know you unprotected sex with someone diagnosed with Chlamydia.

However, because many people with chlamydia may not have symptoms, sexually active teens and adults should be screened periodically for the infection.

Reinfection can occur.

How can I prevent chlamydia?

All sexually active women up through age 25 should be screened yearly for chlamydia. All women with new sexual partners or multiple partners should also be screened.

A mutually monogamous sexual relationship with an uninfected partner is one way to avoid this infection. The proper use of condoms or dental dams during intercourse usually prevents infection.

Additional Resources

CDC Chlamydia Fact Sheet <http://www.cdc.gov/std/chlamydia/stdfact-chlamydia.htm>

Division of STD Prevention (DSTDP), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/std>

American Sexual Health Association <http://www.ashastd.org/>

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