



Chlamydia

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Definition

Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted disease (STD) in the United States, especially among sexually active teens and young adults.

Causes

Chlamydial infection is caused by bacteria known as *Chlamydia trachomatis*. The bacteria are transmitted during oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected partner.

Risk Factors

- Age: 15-25 years old
- Multiple sex partners
- Having sex without a condom
- History of sexually transmitted diseases

Symptoms

It is possible to have a chlamydia infection and have no symptoms. Many people do not know they are infected. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1-3 weeks of exposure. Symptoms include:

In Men:

- White or clear discharge from the penis
- Painful sensation while urinating

In Women:

- Increased or abnormal vaginal discharge
- Strong vaginal odor
- Vaginal redness or irritation
- Painful urination
- Unusual vaginal bleeding
- Pain or bleeding during or after sex
- Abdominal pain

Pregnant women can also transmit chlamydia to their newborns during birth. This may cause conjunctivitis or pneumonia in the baby.

Diagnosis

The symptoms of chlamydia and gonorrhea are very similar, so accurate diagnosis is important. A swab test from the discharge of the penis or the cervix is the most reliable method for detecting chlamydia. A urine sample may also be used. You may also be tested for others STDs, including HIV.

Treatment

Chlamydia is treated with antibiotics. If you have chlamydia, your doctor may prescribe one of the following:

- Azithromycin
- Doxycycline (Vibramycin)
- Erythromycin
- Ofloxacin

It is important that you and your partner both be treated before you have sex again. All of the medicine must be taken as directed. If you still have symptoms after the medication is finished, you may need to be tested again.

Untreated chlamydia can have serious results:

In Men:

- *Testicles*: Chlamydia may cause epididymitis, a painful condition of the testicles that may lead to infertility.
- *Urethra*: The inside of the urethra may become scarred, which can make urinating difficult.
- *Prostate*: Chlamydia may cause inflammation of the prostate gland (prostatitis).
- *Joints*: Chlamydia may cause inflammation of the joints (Reiter's syndrome).
- *Rectum*: Chlamydia may cause inflammation of the rectum in homosexual individuals (anal intercourse).

In Women:

- *Reproductive organs*: Chlamydia can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a serious infection that can affect fertility. PID causes scar tissue to form in the fallopian tubes. This may increase the risk of infertility or a tubal pregnancy.
- *Rectum*: Chlamydia may cause inflammation of the rectum in homosexual individuals (anal intercourse).

Prevention

You can prevent chlamydia by taking the following preventive measures:

- ALWAYS use a latex condom during sexual activity
- Abstain from sex
- Have routine check-ups for sexually transmitted infections, especially if you are under the age of 25
- Have a mutually monogamous relationship
- Get checked regularly for sexually transmitted diseases, especially if you are under the age of 25

Other barrier methods of contraception, such as a diaphragm, may partially protect against chlamydial infection. These methods are not as reliable as a condom.

If you already have chlamydia, you can prevent its transmission by:

- Making sure that all sexual partners are tested and treated
- Refraining from sexual activity until your infection is gone

RESOURCES:

National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention, Division of Sexually Transmitted Diseases
<http://www.cdc.gov/std>