



Chlamydia

What is Chlamydia?

Chlamydia (pronounced “cla-mid-ee-uh”) is the most common sexually transmitted bacteria in the United States. It is much more common than gonorrhea. Health experts estimate that approximately four million people get chlamydia every year. In women, the bacteria can infect the cervix or urethra. In men, it can infect the urethra, prostate gland, or rectum.

The bacteria that causes the infection is *Chlamydia trachomatis*, hence the name, chlamydia. Scientists discovered the bacteria in 1907, although it probably had been infecting people for hundreds of years. Until recently, however, there were no reliable and easy tests for chlamydia.

What are the Symptoms of Chlamydia?

A large percentage of people with chlamydia have no noticeable symptoms of infection. When symptoms are present they are usually mild. Women may experience an unusual vaginal discharge, abnormal bleeding, discomfort in the lower abdomen, or problems with urination. Men infected with the bacteria may complain of a burning sensation with urination or ejaculation, a discharge from the penis, or increased frequency of urination. However, it is important to remember that chlamydia may be present for long periods of time, even years, with no symptoms of infection.

How is Chlamydia Transmitted?

Chlamydia is primarily transmitted from person to person when they have intimate body contact like vaginal, oral, or anal sex. Chlamydia is more easily transmitted from a man to a woman through vaginal intercourse but can be passed between all sexual partners.

Can Chlamydia be Treated?

Chlamydia infections are easily cured with antibiotics. A course of Doxycycline or another antibiotic will be prescribed. Because chlamydia is easily passed between sexual partners, it is recommended that both you and your partner(s) be treated at the same time, even if neither of you are presently having symptoms. A repeat test for chlamydia is recommended 3-4 months after treatment.

Patients should abstain from sexual intercourse until they and their sex partners have completed treatment. abstinence should be continued until 7 days after a single-dose treatment or after a 7-day regimen.

Does Chlamydia Cause Other Problems?

Chlamydia infections that go unrecognized and untreated for long periods of time in women can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a painful infection of the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. PID can increase the risk of a tubal pregnancy or decreased fertility. In men, the bacteria can cause epididymitis, a painful infection of the tiny structures inside the testicles where sperm are stored.

What Happens if a Pregnant Woman Has Chlamydia?

Chlamydia infection during pregnancy may increase the risk of premature delivery. In addition, babies born to women with chlamydia infections can become infected by passing through the birth canal. Such babies run the risk of developing conjunctivitis or pneumonia. A pregnant woman with chlamydia is usually treated with a different antibiotic which will not harm the fetus. If you are pregnant, or think you may be, tell your medical practitioner so the correct antibiotic can be prescribed.

How Do I Protect Myself?

You can reduce your risk of acquiring chlamydia by making careful choices about sexual activity. Plan to protect yourself. Don't let one thing just lead to another; decisions about sexual activity should be active ones. If you do have intercourse, a latex condom provides a high level of protection if it is used properly. Spermicides may increase the protection provided by a condom, but are not adequate alone.

Ideally, testing for chlamydia and other sexually transmitted infections should be done before couples consider having unprotected sex. Sexually active adults should consider annual screening. Remember, chlamydia is very easily treated if it is diagnosed.