

# Chlamydia

Chlamydia is the most common bacterial sexually transmitted disease (STD). It is caused by the bacteria chlamydia trachomatis and can infect the penis, vagina, cervix, anus, urethra, or eye. Because the signs of chlamydia often go unnoticed, an individual can develop serious health complications before recognizing that they are infected.

## PREVALENCE

There are approximately 3 million cases of chlamydia in the US each year and 3 out of every 4 cases reported were in individuals under the age of 25. Though the disease is easily treatable, it can be present without showing any symptoms and individuals can go a long time without knowing they are infected. Because individuals don't always know they are infected, the number of chlamydia infections is significantly underreported.

## TRANSMISSION

Chlamydia can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex and can be transmitted even if there are no signs or symptoms of infection. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her newborn during vaginal childbirth.

## SYMPTOMS

The symptoms for men may include:

- Painful, burning sensation during urination
- Watery or milky discharge from the penis
- Inflammation of the urinary opening
- Pain or swelling in the testicles.

The symptoms for women may include:

- Vaginal irritation or itching
- Abnormal vaginal discharge
- Irregular vaginal bleeding
- Pelvic pain
- Nausea
- Fever
- Pain during intercourse
- Painful urination or a frequent need to urinate.

About 75% of women and 50% of men infected with chlamydia don't have symptoms. Many women only discover they have chlamydia when they have a pelvic exam or when a partner develops symptoms. Because women can have chlamydia and not have any symptoms, they can have the infection for a long time before they receive treatment. Infection can spread from the cervix to the uterus and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). If PID is not treated, it can cause scarring and sterility.

If you experience any of the symptoms above or think you might have been exposed to chlamydia, you should stop having sex and consult a medical provider immediately.

## SYMPTOMS

If you are infected with chlamydia you might not have symptoms, but if symptoms do occur, they usually surface within 1 to 3 weeks of exposure.

## DIAGNOSIS

Your health care provider will take a swab of the vaginal, rectal or urethral opening and this will be analyzed by a lab test. You can make an appointment with UHS or you can contact another testing site in Rochester. If you choose to get tested at UHS, you can ask your health care provider about testing costs and when you can expect your results back during your appointment.

## TREATMENT

Chlamydia infections are usually treated with antibiotics. It is important to take the entire course of medication to make sure the infection is gone.

If you find out that you are infected with chlamydia, you should also notify all of your recent sex partner(s) so that they can be treated, even if they do not have symptoms. This will reduce the risk of your partner(s) experiencing complications from an infection and will reduce your risk of being re-infected. You should not have sex with your partner(s) until you complete your treatment and your partner(s) are tested and complete their treatment.

## HEALTH RISKS

Chlamydia infections can create serious health threats if gone undiagnosed and untreated, especially for women. In women, chlamydia can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can scar and block the fallopian tubes and prevent fertilized eggs from reaching the uterus. If fertilized eggs develop in the tubes, this is called an ectopic pregnancy -- a dangerous situation that requires emergency surgery.

In men, chlamydia can cause sterility. It can spread from the urethra to the testicles where a condition called epididymitis (inflammation of a duct in the testicles) can develop.

Also in men, chlamydia can cause Reiter's syndrome, a condition with symptoms including:

- Urethritis
- Lesions that form hard crusts on the penis
- Ulcers in the mouth or throat
- Conjunctivitis
- Arthritis

## APPOINTMENTS AT UHS

The University Health Service (UHS) offers a full range of health care services for men and women. You can schedule an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) by calling 275-2662. Women can also schedule an appointment with one of the women's health nurse practitioners. All visits to UHS are confidential.

## LINKS

For more information about chlamydia, you can visit:

Planned Parenthood  
[http://www.plannedparenthood.org/sti/stis2.html#\\_2](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/sti/stis2.html#_2)

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