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## Chlamydia

Information here is general in nature. You should always consult a health professional for health problems.

Though many people have never even heard of it, Chlamydia (it's pronounced "Klaa-MID-ee-yah") is a very common infectious disease. It can have very serious consequences if it's not detected and treated. But because the symptoms are so mild, or even unnoticeable sometimes, often it doesn't get detected until damage has been done. About half of infected men and 75% of infected women do not notice any symptoms. U.S. figures say that about 3 million people get infected every year.

Chlamydia is a bacterial infection that can be cured easily with antibiotics if caught early. If it is not treated men can develop inflammation of the testicles. Women can develop PID, Pelvic Inflammatory Disease which is a long term, painful condition.

They can also have ectopic (or tubal) pregnancies. This is when an egg is fertilised outside the uterus, usually in the Fallopian Tubes. This results in a pregnancy where the fetus cannot survive, and if not dealt with medically, swelling and bleeding can occur which can threaten the mother's life. A woman can also become sterile, that is, unable to have a baby, as a result of the PID. Women who have Chlamydia, but who have a normal pregnancy can pass it on to the baby during birth. The bacteria can seriously damage the baby's eyes and lungs.

### **Things to know:**

40% of women with Chlamydia develop Pelvic Inflammatory Disease.

Chlamydia can be easily cured with early diagnosis and antibiotics. The problem is, many people have no clue they are infected (no early diagnosis) because often there are no symptoms, so they don't get treated, and can easily pass it on without knowing it.

Chlamydia is the leading preventable cause of infertility (being unable to have a baby).

A woman with Chlamydia can pass it on to a baby during birth; this can seriously damage the baby's lungs and eyes.

A person with Chlamydia runs a bigger risk of also contracting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

A person with Chlamydia often also has Gonorrhoea.

Chlamydia is spread through sexual intercourse when sexual fluids which contain the bacteria come into contact with mucous membranes of another person, male or female.

The risk of contracting Chlamydia goes up the more sex partners you have, and by having unprotected sex. Note that condoms do not guarantee that you won't get infected; they just improve your chances.

The American CDC (Centres for Disease Control) recommends that sexually active women between 15 and 25, or older women who have new sexual partners, or multiple partners, get tested every year, even if there are no symptoms. About 75% of women and about 50% of men who get infected with Chlamydia show no symptoms early on.

Screening for Chlamydia (large-scale testing) doesn't exist in many areas, so you may have to ask your family doctor, or a Public Health Unit (Waterloo Region Link) clinic about getting checked.

### **How you get Chlamydia**

Have sex with someone who is already infected with it. And remember, many people don't realise they are infected

A baby can get Chlamydia from an infected mother, when the baby is born

Less common, but possible, is transferring the bacteria on fingers, from the genitals to the eyes

**SYMPTOMS:** Generally appear 7 to 21 days after infection according to the Public Health Agency of Canada and [www.std-gov.org/stds](http://www.std-gov.org/stds)

### **Females:**

a new or different discharge from the vagina

a burning feeling when urinating

pain in the lower abdomen, sometimes with fever and chills

pain during sex

vaginal bleeding between periods

vaginal bleeding after intercourse

lower abdominal pain sometimes accompanied by nausea

### **Males:**

a watery or milky drip from the penis

an itchy feeling inside the penis

a burning feeling when urinating

pain or swelling in the testicles

An untreated male can infect a female. Longterm effects on males may include Reiter's disease

The long term effect on many females is the chronic (long lasting) pain of Pelvic Inflammatory Disease and/or infertility (not being able to have a baby). As well, if a woman has Chlamydia when she is pregnant, she may have an ectopic pregnancy (the fetus starts growing outside the womb) or a premature baby.

The long term effects on men may be inflammation and pain in the testicles, reduced fertility (less able to father a baby) or even sterility (not able to father a baby). Less common but a possible result of Chlamydia in males is [Reiter's disease](#), seemingly an auto-immune disease that can affect eyes, mouth, skin kidneys and more, besides the genitals. (Warning: [Very graphic image](#) of symptoms of Reiter disease on the head of a penis. It can also appear on other areas of the body)

## **PREVENTION AND TREATMENT**

Abstinence is the best way to prevent getting Chlamydia, or pretty much any sexually transmitted disease. If you are sexually active though, you should avoid sexual contact with infected people. But if you've read the stuff above, you know it's very hard for many people to even know if they are infected. So it's impossible for you to know; they may say they are "clean" (not infected), but they may not know if they are infected! So, for sexually active people the best thing would be to be with one, un-infected person, in a monogamous relationship (you only have sex with the other person and they only have sex with you). And you should get tested once a year.

Condoms: If they are used correctly, the risk is *lower* but there is no guarantee. The condom does not stop all sexual fluids from coming in contact with another person's mucous membranes.

Getting tested: Chlamydia can be tested for with a simple urine sample; it can also be checked if a woman is having swabs taken from the cervix or the vagina. A guy can also be tested with a urethral swab - at the opening of the penis. You can talk to your doctor or, often, you can go to a Public Health Clinic. Results usually take about a week. Avoid sex until you know if you have an infection. Also avoid sex after taking treatment until your doctor gives you the go-ahead.

To help stop the spread of Chlamydia, you will likely be asked about your sexual partner or partners, who should get tested too. Remember that this is an easy to cure infection once it is identified.

Treatment: Some medication must be taken every day for a week, but there is also a single dose treatment that your doctor may prescribe. You can't use just any old antibiotic so don't use antibiotics you may have around, or a friend's medications. Get a prescription, get the right medication, get cured. It is very important that you take all of the medication exactly the way it is prescribed. And remember to come back for a check-up after treatment.

Don't get re-infected: Even if you were cured last week, having sex with an infected person will re-infect you. So it's important that your sexual partner(s) get tested and treated too!