

## Chlamydia

Chlamydia is caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis* and is a very common sexually transmissible infection (STI). It is often called the 'silent infection' because most people do not realise they have it. It can affect women and men of all ages, but most frequently occurs in people who are under 25 years of age.

Chlamydia is spread by vaginal or anal sex with an infected person.

### Symptoms in women

Most women who are infected have no signs or symptoms of chlamydia. It can infect the neck of the uterus (cervix) and spread to the uterus and fallopian tubes, causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), chronic pelvic pain, pregnancy in the fallopian tubes and infertility. If a mother has chlamydia, it can be passed on to a baby during birth, causing lung or eye infections.

In women, if symptoms are present, they may include:

- An unusual vaginal discharge
- A burning feeling when urinating
- Pain during sex
- Bleeding or spotting between periods or bleeding after sex
- Lower abdominal pain.

### Symptoms in men

Men who have chlamydia usually do not have any signs or symptoms. In men, chlamydia infects the urethra (tube of the penis) and may spread to the epididymis – the tube that carries sperm from the testicles – causing pain.

In men, if symptoms are present, they may include:

- A discharge from the penis
- Discomfort when urinating
- Swollen and sore testes.

### Diagnosis

Chlamydia is an easily diagnosed and curable STI. Tests are painless and usually involve a simple urine test in men or women. Alternatively, a cotton swab may be used to test for chlamydia from the vagina, cervix, anus or penis. The specimen is then sent to the laboratory for testing.

### Chlamydia is spread through 'unsafe' sex

Chlamydia is spread when a person has vaginal or anal sex with an infected person and does not practice safe sex by using a condom or a dam. A dam is a thin square of latex, which fits over the vagina or anus.

Since chlamydia infection often has no symptoms, many people do not realise they have the infection. Even if you know a person well, you may not be able to tell they have an STI because people can look healthy and still have chlamydia.

Remember you can get chlamydia and other STIs from a new sexual partner who has had sex with an earlier partner. It can also be spread from a long-term partner who has sex with other people.

### Chlamydia check-ups

An annual chlamydia check-up is highly recommended for all sexually active people under 25 years of age.

### Treatment

If detected early, chlamydia can be treated with a single dose of antibiotics. If complications from chlamydia infection are present, such as pelvic inflammatory disease in women, a longer course of antibiotics will be required. If you have chlamydia, your sexual partner also needs to be informed, tested and treated as they may be infected and can infect you again after treatment. You should have another test for chlamydia three months after you are treated.

### Prevention

Safe sex practices reduce the risk of STI transmission. Using condoms and dams during vaginal and anal sex to create a protective barrier protects you from getting chlamydia, as well as other STIs.

Condoms for men can be bought from supermarkets, pharmacists and other outlets. Female condoms and dams are available through Family Planning Victoria and may be available from selected shops. Latex free condoms are also available from some outlets. Male condoms and lubricant are available free from the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre, along with female condoms and dams on request.

### Where to get help

You can contact the following services for help and further advice:

- Your doctor
- Your school nurse or school welfare coordinator
- Youth worker, welfare worker or social worker
- Your local community health centre
- The Action Centre (for young people less than 25 years) Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9654 4766
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9257 0100
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9341 6200 or 1800 032 017 or TTY (for the hearing impaired) (03) 9347 8619
- Victoria AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre Tel. (03) 9865 6700 or 1800 134 840
- The Education and Resource Centre at The Alfred Tel. (03) 9276 6993.
- The Centre Clinic, Northcote Tel. (03) 9481 7155
- The Centre Clinic, St Kilda Tel. (03) 9525 5866
- The Annexe Sexual Health Clinic Ballarat Tel. (03) 5320 7500
- BBV/STI Clinic Bendigo Tel. (03) 5434 4330
- Geelong Sexual Health Clinic Tel. (03) 5221 4735
- STD Clinic Wodonga Tel. (03) 6051 7535
- STD/AIDS Clinic Traralgon Tel. (03) 5173 8111
- Marie Stopes International Tel. 1800 003 707 (24 hours)

### Things to remember

- If left untreated, chlamydia can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in women, which can lead to chronic pain and infertility.
- If detected early, chlamydia can be treated with a single dose of antibiotics.
- Partners of people with chlamydia also need to be informed, tested and treated as they may be infected.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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