

Fact Sheet

Chlamydia

**What is chlamydia?**

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmissible infection (STI) caused by a bacteria. It affects both men and women. Most people who have chlamydia don't have any symptoms. This means that they can pass it on to a partner during sex, without knowing it. If it is left untreated it can cause serious long term problems.

In women

Chlamydia can infect the cervix (the neck of the womb) and the urethra (the tube for the passage of urine). While most women have no symptoms, it can sometimes cause an unusual discharge from the vagina, or pain during sex. Some women with chlamydia have irregular bleeding from the vagina, especially after sex. But most women have no symptoms at all.

The problem is that if it isn't treated, chlamydia can spread up into the uterus and fallopian tubes causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Some women who develop PID can be very unwell with fever and pain in the lower abdomen. But even if the symptoms are very mild, PID can still damage or block the fallopian tubes. PID can cause problems with fertility (the ability to get pregnant), ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus), and chronic pain low in the abdomen.

Pregnant women with chlamydia may be at risk of having smaller or premature babies and of getting PID after the birth. Chlamydia can pass from mother to baby during birth, and cause lung and eye infections.

In men

Chlamydia can infect the urethra (the tube for passage of urine and semen in the penis). Some men have pain when they pass urine, and a watery or milky discharge from the penis, but a lot of men have no symptoms at all. Untreated, chlamydia can spread to the testes, the prostate gland, and the tubes that carry sperm, which may result in chronic pain and/or fertility problems.

How is chlamydia spread?

Chlamydia is transmitted by having sex with someone who already has it. Chlamydia cannot live long outside the body so it can't be caught from toilets, swimming pools or spas, or from everyday contact with people. Using condoms every time during sex with new a partner will reduce your chance of catching chlamydia and other STIs.

How is chlamydia tested?

Men can have a simple urine test. It is best if you have not passed urine for one hour prior to the test.

Women can have either a urine test or a swab taken from the cervix or vagina. This can be done on its own, as part of other testing for STIs, or as an extra test with a Pap test.

Should I have a chlamydia test?

You should have a chlamydia test if:

- you are under 30 years of age and have been sexually active - people under 30 have high rates of infection
- you have symptoms such as discharge, pain when you pass urine, pain low in your abdomen, pain during sex, or irregular bleeding from the vagina, especially after sex
- you have another STI such as gonorrhoea, herpes, or genital warts
- your partner has chlamydia or another STI
- you have had unprotected sex without a condom with a new partner

How is chlamydia treated?

Most people with chlamydia take a single dose of antibiotic tablets. The antibiotic is called azithromycin. Women who have PID need a longer course of antibiotics, usually for two weeks.

It is important to avoid having sex while you are taking the antibiotics and for one week after they are finished, so that you don't pass on the infection to someone else, or become infected again yourself.

Sexual partner/s should be checked for STIs and be treated for chlamydia as well. This is called 'contact tracing'.

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It is recommended that you have another test for chlamydia three months later to make sure you haven't been infected again. Repeat infections are more likely to cause long term problems such as blocked fallopian tubes.

Where can I go for advice and testing?

- A Family Planning clinic
- A sexual health clinic. To view a full listing of NSW Sexual Health Services, call the NSW Sexual Health Information Line on 1800 451 624, or visit www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/sexualhealth/sexual_plus.asp
- A local doctor

For more information

- Contact the Family Planning NSW Talkline on 1300 658 886 or go to www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline
- NRS (for deaf) 133 677
- Or visit your nearest Family Planning clinic

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