

Chlamydia

What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) caused by bacteria that infect the cervix, urethra and other reproductive organs. Chlamydia is easy to treat and can be cured.

Symptoms

Approximately 70 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men infected with chlamydia have no symptoms. They can unknowingly pass the infection on to their sexual partner(s). If symptoms develop, they appear two to six weeks after sexual contact with an infected person.

Women may have vaginal itching or increased discharge from the vagina. They may also have bleeding during or after sexual intercourse, bleeding or spotting between menstrual periods, pain in the lower abdomen or burning when passing urine.

Men may have discharge and itching around the urethra or penis. (The urethra is the opening in the penis.) They may also have burning when passing urine, frequent passing of urine, or pain and swelling in the testicles.

How it spreads

Chlamydia spreads through unprotected oral, anal or vaginal sex with an infected person. Sometimes, chlamydia can be spread to the eyes by the hands following direct contact with the infected fluids. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby

during birth. Until a person finishes treatment, he/she continues to have the infection and can pass it on to others.

Complications

Untreated chlamydia in women may lead to a condition called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID is a serious infection of the lining of the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries.

Sometimes the fallopian tubes of a woman with PID are blocked by scar tissue and her eggs cannot pass through. When this happens, she may not be able to get pregnant. If the fallopian tubes are only partially blocked, sperm may pass through resulting in a pregnancy inside the fallopian tube called an ectopic pregnancy. Women with untreated chlamydia may be at higher risk for miscarriages.

Men with untreated chlamydia may become sterile if the tubes carrying the sperm are blocked by scar tissue. They may have swelling and pain in their testicles, a condition called epididymitis. Some men may also develop arthritis.



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Infants who are born to mothers with untreated chlamydia may become ill with pneumonia or eye infections.

Diagnosis

Chlamydia testing can be done as soon as requested after exposure:

- For women, a test can be done by taking a sample from the cervix (the opening to the uterus).
- For men, a sample is taken from the urethra. Men should not pass urine at least one hour before the test.
- For men and women, a urine sample, throat swab or rectal swab can also be collected to test for chlamydia.

Treatment

Chlamydia is treated with antibiotic pills. Some of the commonly used antibiotics include Azithromycin and Doxycycline. It is important that you complete the treatment as directed by your health care provider. Even if your symptoms have disappeared, you must finish all the pills to make sure that you are cured. To reduce the risk of reinfection, abstaining from sexual contact for seven days following treatment is recommended. If you have PID or epididymitis, you may need to visit a hospital and be treated with intravenous antibiotics.

Your last sexual partner and all sexual partners within the past 60 days should be examined and treated. Tell your partner(s) that having no symptoms does not mean there is no infection. **A York Region public health nurse can help you notify your partner(s). Your name will be kept confidential.**

Protection

- Abstain from sex or limit your number of sexual partners.
- Make informed decisions by talking to your partner about his/her sexual health and the use of (protection) condoms or dental dams before having sex.
- Ask your partner(s) to be tested before you have sex.
- Always use a condom from beginning to end of any oral, anal or vaginal sex.
- Get an STI checkup – especially if you've had a new or more than one sexual partner or suspect you have an infection.

Followup

A followup test is recommended one month after you have completed the treatment to make sure that you are cured.

Remember:

- Take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor or clinic.
- Do not have oral, vaginal or anal sex with your partner(s) until seven days after the last partner has completed treatment.
- You can get re-infected every time you have sex with an untreated or infected partner.
- It is possible to have more than one infection at a time, so it is important to be tested for other STIs.
- Having chlamydia can increase the likelihood of transmission of HIV from an HIV-infected partner to an uninfected partner.

Chlamydia is a reportable disease. York Region Community and Health Services must be notified so appropriate case and contact followup can be done.



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