

Chlamydia



What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United Kingdom, which if untreated can damage reproductive (sex) organs. It is sometimes known as 'the silent disease' because many people show no symptoms and don't know they are infected until complications develop.

What are the symptoms of chlamydia in women?

If symptoms appear, they usually do so one to three weeks after becoming infected. Women may experience a change in vaginal discharge, cystitis (pain when passing water) and mild lower abdominal pain.

If the disease is untreated, it can lead to severe pelvic pain, pain during intercourse or, more rarely, bleeding between periods. Other symptoms may include inflammation of the neck of the womb (cervicitis), inflammation of the fallopian tubes (salpingitis) and inflammation of the glands that produce sexual lubricant mucus (bartholinitis).

What are the symptoms of chlamydia in men?

Roughly half of all men who get chlamydia show symptoms. These symptoms include a discharge from the penis, inflammation of the tube leading from the bladder to the tip of the penis (urethritis) or inflammation of the tube leading from the testis to the penis (epididymitis). Men may also experience pain or burning when passing urine.

How do you become infected with chlamydia?

The infection is passed from person to person during unprotected sexual activity (including during oral, vaginal, or anal sex). Anyone who is sexually active can contract chlamydia. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during normal vaginal delivery.

How is chlamydia diagnosed?

Laboratory tests are carried out on swabs taken from the cervix (neck of the womb) or from the penis, or by testing urine samples.

The National Chlamydia Screening Programme (NCSP), which is gradually being introduced across England, offers screening for chlamydia to men and women under 25 years of age.

What is the treatment for chlamydia?

A simple course of antibiotics can cure the infection. Patients should always complete the full course. It is important to treat the infected person's regular sexual partner at the same time because he or she is probably infected too.

Complications are more difficult to treat, but with early diagnosis and treatment the risk of getting complications is greatly reduced. With early treatment, the bacteria are eradicated in more than 95 per cent of cases.

How can you avoid getting chlamydia?

Practicing safe sex, by using a condom during sexual intercourse, will reduce the risk of contracting chlamydia. Having sex with fewer partners also reduces the risk of infection.

What are the complications of chlamydia for women?

Complications can occur if a chlamydial infection persists for a long time without treatment. They are most common and most severe in women and include:

- pelvic inflammatory disease, (this affects 10 to 40 per cent of women with chlamydia) and can cause chronic pain
- ectopic egg pregnancy (where the fertilized egg starts developing outside the womb)
- infertility.
- abscesses in the fallopian tubes and on the ovaries
- liver infections
- conjunctivitis

More than one third of babies born to infected women develop eye or lung infections and there is some evidence which shows that untreated chlamydial infections in pregnant women can lead to premature delivery.

What are the complications of chlamydia for men?

- Urethral infection (affecting the tube from the bladder to the tip of the penis)
- Inflammation of the prostate gland
- Scarring or blocking of the tubes which carry sperm (epididymitis), resulting in decreased fertility
- A form of arthritis (Reiter's syndrome)
- Conjunctivitis

Should you abstain from sexual activity if you have chlamydia?

A chlamydial infection is often present with other sexually transmitted infections. It is advisable to check if another infection is present. People with infections should abstain from sexual intercourse until they and their partners have been successfully treated. If someone cannot abstain, then a BSI kite-marked (BS EN 600) condom should be used for all sexual intercourse.

The Health Protection Agency and chlamydia

We are responsible for collecting and analysing information about chlamydia, looking for any patterns and trends in the disease, which could help with treatment and prevention.

More information about the Health Protection Agency and chlamydia is available on our website at <http://www.hpa.org.uk>

If you have concerns about your health contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647, visit their website <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>, or see your family doctor.

If you have any further questions,
please contact

Health Protection Agency

Centre for Infections
61 Colindale Avenue
London
NW9 5EQ
Tel 020 8200 4400
Fax 020 8205 9185
www.hpa.org.uk

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