

## Education

### Chlamydial Infection in Women

What is chlamydial infection?

Chlamydia is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases in the US. It can affect several parts of the body. In women the infections often occur in the urinary tract and female organs.

How does it occur?

The organisms that cause the infection are called *Chlamydia trachomatis*. They are similar to bacteria. The infection is usually passed from person to person during sexual intercourse. It can also be passed by other intimate contact with the genital or rectal area.

An infection can be passed from a pregnant woman to her baby during birth. Chlamydia can cause the baby to have eye infections or pneumonia.

What are the symptoms?

Possible symptoms include:

- abnormal vaginal discharge
- mild pain or discomfort when you urinate
- menstrual periods that are heavier than usual
- more painful periods
- abdominal pain
- spotting between periods or after sex.

Often there are no symptoms, especially early in the infection.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and do a pelvic exam. You will have a lab test of discharge from the cervix or urine.

Because chlamydia is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases, health care providers recommend yearly tests for chlamydia in sexually active teens and young women up to age 24. A test for chlamydia is also recommended for any woman who has a new sex partner or multiple sexual partners.

How is it treated?

Taking antibiotics usually cures the infection. You may need to take more than one antibiotic, especially if there is a chance you have other infections, such as gonorrhea. Your sexual partner or partners should also have treatment even if they have no symptoms.

Make sure to tell your health care provider if you are or think you are pregnant, so he or she will prescribe the correct antibiotic.

How long will the effects last?

Without treatment the disease can cause serious problems, such as scarring of the fallopian tubes, tubal pregnancy, and infertility. With antibiotic treatment, the symptoms usually go away within a few days after you start taking the medicine.

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow the full treatment prescribed by your health care provider. This includes taking your medicine for as long as it is prescribed, even if your symptoms are gone before you have finished taking it.
- Take aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce pain.

- If you are taking the antibiotic tetracycline or doxycycline, avoid milk products 1 to 2 hours before and after you take the medicine. Also, avoid sun exposure. The medicine may cause you to be very sensitive to the sun and get a severe sunburn.
- Follow your health care provider's instructions for follow-up visits and tests. Your provider will need to check that the infection is gone.
- Tell everyone with whom you have had sex in the last 3 months about your infection. They must also be treated, even if they have no symptoms. Do not have sex before both you and your partner have finished all the medicine and your provider says it is OK.
- Have a checkup every year. See your provider between checkups if you are having symptoms of vaginal infection or discomfort during sex.
- Call your health care provider right away if:
  - You develop severe abdominal pain.
  - You vomit and cannot hold the medicine down.
  - You develop a fever over 100°F (37.8°C).
- You feel you are getting sicker rather than better.

How can I help prevent chlamydial infection?

- Reduce the risk of infection by always using latex or polyurethane condoms during foreplay and vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse.
- Have just 1 sexual partner who is not sexually active with anyone else. Make sure your partner has been tested for chlamydia and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Even if you don't have symptoms but have had unprotected sex (without a condom), see your health care provider to be checked for sexually transmitted diseases. If you have been sexually assaulted and are at risk for having been infected with chlamydia, you should be treated to prevent infection.
- If you are pregnant, tell your health care provider so you can help prevent infection in the baby.

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