



Chlamydia

What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is an infection caused by a germ or bacteria.

How is it spread?

It is spread by having unprotected sex – not using a condom – with someone who is infected with chlamydia. An infected person can transmit chlamydia any time, whether or not symptoms are present. An infected person is contagious until he or she has been treated. Most people with chlamydia do not know they have it as they have no changes with their body.

To find out if you have chlamydia, you must be examined by a doctor or nurse and have tests taken.

What are the symptoms?

If symptoms appear, it is usually one to three weeks after exposure to an infected person.

Chlamydia may not cause symptoms until the infection has spread to other areas of the body.

For women, symptoms can include:

- A burning feeling when urinating;
- A change in periods or more painful periods;
- Bleeding or blood spotting from the vagina;
- Pain during sexual intercourse;
- Pain in the lower stomach area;
- Conjunctivitis or pink eye;
- The need to urinate more often; or
- A slight fever.

For men, symptoms can include:

- Abnormal fluid from the penis;
- An itching feeling inside the penis;
- Pain while urinating or a need to urinate more often; or
- Conjunctivitis or pink eye.

What are the complications?

Chlamydia causes no long-term problems if treated early during the infection. Untreated chlamydia can lead to complications.

In women, it can spread and cause infection in reproductive organs and other parts of the body. It can also cause pelvic inflammatory disease or PID in women. See HealthLink BC File [#08c PID](#) for more information. Pregnant women may pass the infection to their baby's eyes during childbirth. This can cause irritation in the baby's eyes, and may need to be treated.

In men, complications can include infection in the urethra or the testicles or an inflammation of the prostate.

What is the treatment?

The treatment for chlamydia is antibiotic pills. Any person(s) you have had sex with within the previous two months must also be treated, whether they have symptoms or not. Follow up tests are recommended six months after treatment.

Important: Do not have sex until you and your partner(s) have finished taking the prescribed pills. Take all of the medication exactly as instructed.

Should I be tested for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

If you have different sexual partners, or if your partner has different partners, you should also be tested for other STIs including gonorrhea, syphilis and HIV (the virus linked to AIDS). You should also consider getting vaccine shots to prevent hepatitis B virus infection.

Please remember: The more sexual partners you have, the higher your risk of getting a STI.

Birth control pills

Birth control pills may not work very well when you are taking some antibiotic medicines. Keep taking your birth control pills while taking any medication, and also use a second form of birth control, such as a condom, until your next period after completing the antibiotics.

Ways to reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection

- Have sex with only one partner who has been tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), who has been treated if necessary and who is having sex only with you. The more partners you have, the higher your risk of getting an STI.
- Use a female or male condom every time you have sex. Condoms offer protection against STIs, but they must be used properly.
- Have regular check-ups for STIs.
- Decide not to have sex.

Important facts about condoms

- A condom acts like a barrier that helps prevent the exchange of body fluids, the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy.
- A new condom should be used each time you have sexual intercourse (anal, vaginal, or oral sex).
- Check the expiry date on the condom package.
- Use only water-based lubricants with the male latex condom. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil, can weaken and destroy latex.
- Female condoms are made of polyurethane. This material can be used with any type of lubricant, water-based or oil-based.
- Some lubricants contain chemicals called spermicides to help protect against unwanted pregnancy. If they irritate your genitals, don't use them.
- Do not use a male condom together with a female condom as the friction created may cause tearing of either product.
- If a condom breaks during sex remove it immediately and apply a new condom.
- Remember! Condoms do not offer 100 per cent protection from STIs and unwanted pregnancy. It will not consistently prevent transmission of STIs passed through skin-to-skin contact – for example, syphilis, human papilloma virus (warts) and herpes. However, if used properly, they are very effective and can reduce the risk of transmission of these STIs.

Putting on a male condom

- Take the condom carefully out of the packet.
- Place the condom on the tip of the penis when it is hard and erect, but before it touches the partner's body. Make sure that the rolled-up condom rim faces outward.
- With the other hand, pinch the tip of the condom to remove any trapped air, and unroll the condom to the base of the erect penis.

- After intercourse and before the penis becomes soft, withdraw the penis carefully, holding the rim of the condom against the penis, so that semen does not spill out.
- Slide the condom gently off the penis, and knot the open end.
- After using the condom, throw it in the garbage.

Putting on a female condom

- A condom can be inserted up to eight hours before sexual intercourse.
- Open the package carefully. Hold the small ring at the closed end of the condom between the thumb and middle finger.
- Find a comfortable position, either lying down, sitting with your knees apart or standing with one foot raised on a stool, squeeze the small ring and insert it into the vagina as far as you can.
- Put a finger inside the condom and push the small ring inside as far as possible. It is also possible to insert the condom by putting it onto the erect penis before intercourse.
- Make sure that the part of the condom with the outer ring is outside the body. The outer ring will lie flat against the body when the penis is inside the condom.
- When the penis enters the vagina, make sure that the penis is inside the condom.
- Immediately after sexual intercourse, remove the condom by gently twisting the outer ring and pulling the condom out, making sure that no semen is spilt and throw it in the garbage.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.

