

Cervicitis

What is cervicitis?

Cervicitis is an inflammation of the cervix (the lower narrow part of the uterus that opens into the vagina). Cervicitis is common and affects many women at some point during their adult lives.

What causes cervicitis?

Cervicitis is often caused by sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like gonorrhea, chlamydia, trichomoniasis or herpes simplex (a virus). It can also be caused by other organisms that are not sexually transmitted. Reactions or irritations to latex, douches or vaginal creams can also cause cervicitis.

To find out if you have cervicitis, you must be examined by a health care provider and have lab tests done.

How is it spread?

The sexually transmitted organisms that cause cervicitis are spread through unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of cervicitis can include:

- Changes in the amount and/or color of fluid from the vagina
- Abnormal vaginal bleeding or spotting between periods or after sexual intercourse
- Pain during vaginal sex

It is also possible to have cervicitis and not have any symptoms.

What are the potential complications?

When the infection that is causing cervicitis is not treated, it can spread to the uterus and fallopian tubes. These infections can lead to difficulty getting pregnant, tubal pregnancies or ongoing pelvic pain.

What is the treatment?

Cervicitis that is caused by bacteria may be treated with antibiotic pills. It is important to follow your treatment instructions carefully. If you were given pills, finish all of them. If the infection is sexually transmitted, sexual partners should be tested and treated. It takes time for the infection to clear from the body, so it is important that you do not have any oral, vaginal or anal sex for 7 days after you and your partner(s) start the antibiotic treatment.

If you or your partner(s) do not finish the treatment, miss pills or have unprotected sex before you have finished all of the medication, there is a chance that the infection will stay in your body or may be passed back to you or your partner(s). If this happens, talk with your health care provider who will help you to decide if you need further treatment. Other treatments may be offered by your health care provider if another cause is identified.

Will my birth control work if I am taking antibiotics?

There is very little evidence to show that antibiotics stop hormonal forms of birth control from working. Examples of hormonal birth control include the pill, the patch, the ring or the shot. If you are being treated with antibiotics, it is important to keep using your birth control as you normally would. If you have concerns, use condoms until your next period comes after completing the antibiotics, or speak to your health care provider for more information.

How can I reduce my chance of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Practice safer sex by using a condom

When used correctly, external ("male") and internal ("female") condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms are less effective at protecting against STIs transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, such as

herpes simplex virus, genital warts (human papillomavirus (HPV)) and syphilis (when sores are present).

Important things to remember when using condoms:

- Check the condom package for damage. Do not use a damaged condom
- Check the expiry date. Do not use a condom after its expiry date
- Carefully open the package so that the condom does not tear. Do not use a condom that has been torn
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects such as rings, studs or piercings
- Store condoms at room temperature
- Use a new condom every time you have sex. Do not reuse condoms
- Do not use 2 condoms at once. Using 2 condoms together may result in a condom breaking
- Use only water-based lubricants with external ("male") latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil, can weaken and destroy latex
- Water or oil-based lubricant may be used with polyurethane/nitrile condoms
- Use only condoms made of latex or polyurethane/nitrile/polyisoprene rubbers. Latex and polyurethane condoms are the best types of condoms to use to help prevent pregnancy and STIs. (Lambskin and sheepskin condoms can help prevent pregnancy but don't work as well as latex or polyurethane condoms to prevent STIs)
- Avoid using condoms with spermicides containing nonoxynol-9 (N-9) as it can irritate tissue and may increase the chance of getting an STI

Get vaccinated

Some STIs, such as hepatitis A, B and human papillomavirus (HPV) can be prevented with vaccines. Talk to your health care provider about how to get these vaccinations.

Know your sexual health status

If you have recently changed sexual partners, or have multiple sex partners, getting regularly tested for STIs will tell you if you have an infection. Some people can have an STI and not have any symptoms. Finding and treating an STI reduces the chances of passing infections on to your partner(s).

The more partners you have, the higher your chances of getting exposed to STIs.

Talk about prevention

Talk to your partner(s) about STIs and how you would like to prevent them before having sex. If you are having trouble discussing safer sex with your partner(s), talk about it with your health care provider or a counsellor.

For tips on how to talk to your partner(s), visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource <https://smartsexresource.com/sexual-health/partners-communication/talking-to-your-partners>.

Informing partners

If you have a sexually transmitted infection and are sexually active, it is important to tell your sexual partner(s). This will enable them to make decisions about their health and getting tested.

For more information

For more information on how you can reduce your chance of getting an STI, see [HealthLinkBC File #080 Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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