

# What You Should Know About Chlamydia

**C**hlamydia is a common, sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by bacteria. Many times, signs or symptoms of chlamydia are “silent”—meaning you cannot usually tell if you have it. If left untreated, chlamydia can cause serious damage to a woman’s reproductive organs, and may lead to infertility.

## How is chlamydia spread?

Chlamydia is spread by having oral, anal, or vaginal sex with an infected partner. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during vaginal birth. Anyone who is sexually active can be infected with chlamydia. The more sex partners a woman has, the greater her risk of infection.

Teenage girls and young women are especially at risk for getting chlamydia. This is because their cervix (the passageway to the uterus) is not fully developed and more prone to infection. For this reason, sexually active members of this age group should be tested for chlamydia yearly.

## How do I know if I have chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a silent disease because the majority of women who have chlamydia don’t know they have it. It usually does not have any signs or symptoms.

You can prevent chlamydia by:

- not having sex
- being in a long-term, monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is uninfected
- correctly using latex male condoms each time during sex.

If a woman has symptoms of chlamydia, they usually appear in 1 to 3 weeks after infection. Symptoms may include:

- unusual discharge or abnormal bleeding from the vagina
- painful and frequent urination
- burning or itching in the vaginal area
- redness or swelling of the genital area
- pain during sex
- pain, bleeding, or discharge from the rectum during anal sex.

Even still, many women may not know if they have chlamydia. To find out, get tested by your doctor.

## What happens if chlamydia is left untreated?

If chlamydia is not treated, it can damage a woman’s reproductive system. The infection can spread to the



uterus or fallopian tubes and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Pelvic inflammatory disease usually causes symptoms similar to those caused by chlamydia, and can also cause pelvic or abdominal pain. Like chlamydia, PID can also be a silent condition, meaning you may not know you have it.

Pelvic inflammatory disease can lead to chronic pelvic pain, ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy that happens outside the uterus), or even infertility. A pregnant woman with untreated chlamydia can pass on chlamydia to her baby, which can cause serious health problems for the baby.

## How is chlamydia diagnosed? Is it curable?

Diagnosing chlamydia is easy: just ask your doctor to test you. Testing is painless and quick. A lab can identify if you have chlamydia by testing a urine sample. Also, a cervix or vaginal sample collected by your doctor (done by gently rubbing a swab on the cervix or in the vagina) can be tested for chlamydia.

If chlamydia is diagnosed, it’s easily treated and cured with antibiotics. Be sure to finish all the medicine you are given, and don’t share it with others. If you still have symptoms after the medicine is finished, go back to your doctor. Your doctor will retest you 3 to 4 months after you finish treatment and the chlamydial infection has cleared up. It’s important to be retested, especially if you’re not sure your partner was also treated.

Chlamydia is a silent disease that can damage a woman’s reproductive organs. Because most women don’t know they have chlamydia, experts recommend that **all** sexually active women aged 25 and younger get tested yearly. Older women who have a new sex partner or multiple sex partners, and women who are pregnant should also be tested.