What you need to know about chlamydia

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that is most easily passed on during sex without a condom. It can infect the genitals, rectum and throat. The infection can be cured with antibiotics, and there are ways to lower the chance of getting or passing on chlamydia, such as using a condom each time you have sex.

The words we use here - CATIE is committed to using language that is relevant to everyone. People use different terms to describe their bodies. This text uses medical terms, such as vagina and penis, to describe genitals. Other people may use other terms, such as private parts or dick or front hole. CATIE acknowledges and respects that people use words that they are most comfortable with.

What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). It can infect the genitals, rectum and throat. A person with chlamydia can pass it on to another person during sex.

Many people with chlamydia have no symptoms, so they don’t know they have an infection. When symptoms do occur, they usually take 2 to 3 weeks to appear but it can take as long as six weeks. Common symptoms vary depending on where the infection is:

- Infections of the genitals can cause an unusual fluid (or discharge) to come out of the vagina or the penis, and pain when urinating (peeing).
- Rectal infections can cause discharge or bleeding from the anus and pain in the anus.
- Throat or mouth infections can cause a sore throat.

If it is not treated, chlamydia may lead to infertility, abdominal pain or pregnancy complications.

Could I get chlamydia?

Anyone who is sexually active, including people who experience sexual violence, can get chlamydia.

Chlamydia is most easily passed on during sex without a condom; this includes vaginal intercourse and anal intercourse.

Although less common, chlamydia can also be passed on:

- when a person with the infection in their mouth or throat gives oral sex to another person
- when a person gives oral sex to a person with an infection of the genitals
- through oral-anal contact (rimming)
- through sharing sex toys or during a hand job or fingering if infected fluids get onto the toy or hand

Chlamydia and HIV

For people with HIV, a chlamydia infection may increase the amount of HIV in bodily fluids and increase the chance of passing on HIV to sex partners.

Someone who has chlamydia may be more likely to get HIV if they are exposed to HIV during sex.

What can I do?

Prevent infection

Use a condom during vaginal intercourse and anal intercourse.
Use a condom or oral dam during oral sex.

There is no vaccine to protect against chlamydia.

Get tested

The only way to know for sure whether or not you have chlamydia is to get tested. A doctor or nurse can do the test. The test involves a swab of the genitals, rectum or throat or a urine (pee) sample. Tell the doctor or nurse about all the different kinds of sex you are having so they can test all the right parts of your body.

It is a good idea to get tested for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, when you get tested for chlamydia. Other STIs can be passed on in the same way as chlamydia. Talk to your healthcare provider about how often you should test for chlamydia and other STIs.

If you are diagnosed with chlamydia, a public health staff person will talk to you about informing your sex partners that they might have been exposed to chlamydia and encouraging them to get tested. Your identity will not be revealed.

Get treated

Chlamydia can be cured with a single dose or a short course of antibiotics. If you are given a single dose to treat the infection, you should wait for seven days after taking it before having sex again. If you are given pills to take for seven days, you should wait until you have taken all the pills before having sex again. If you have a regular partner or partners, they should also be treated before you have sex with them.

Once you are cured, you cannot pass on chlamydia to your sex partners. But you can be infected again. Being treated for chlamydia does not protect you from getting chlamydia in the future.

Credits

This information sheet was developed in partnership with the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN).

Resource

Chlamydia - CATIE fact sheet
Disclaimer

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV- and hepatitis C-related illness and the treatments in question.

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