



Whatcom County Health Department

FACT SHEET: CHLAMYDIA

What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a disease caused by bacteria (germs). It is passed from one person to another during sex. It can also pass from mother to baby at birth.

Is it a new disease?

- No. There are several types of chlamydia, but it has been known for about 20 years that one type of chlamydia germ causes a sexually transmitted disease (STD).
- And, this STD causes major problems if it is not treated.

How common is it?

- It is the most common STD.
- It is also one of the most harmful.
- People can have the disease without having symptoms
- More than four million Americans get this STD each year
- Chlamydia is:
 1. two to three times more common than gonorrhea
 2. six times more common than herpes
 3. 30 times more common than syphilis

Is it serious?

- Yes. If not treated, chlamydia can cause real harm. The germs will infect the tubes of the sex organs of both men and women. The tubes can become blocked by scar tissue. This means the person could become sterile.
- Chlamydia is the main cause of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a major infection for women.
- In men, it is the cause of an infection of the urethra, the tube of the penis. This is called nongonococcal urethritis (NGU).

- Chlamydia can cause an infection of the tubes leading to the testicles called epididymitis. This severe infection can lead to fever, swelling and pain.
- With chlamydia, both men and women can get eye infections called conjunctivitis and an infection in the rectum.
- A baby born to a mother with chlamydia can get an eye infection and sometimes pneumonia.

What are the symptoms?

- Most of those infected with this disease—75% of women and 50% of men—will have no symptoms.
- For both men and women, there may be a very slight discharge or a burning feeling when urinating.
- For men, swelling of the testicles can be a sign.
- If the rectum is infected, it may be sore.

Is there a test?

- Yes, there are several tests. For one test a swab is used to get a sample. Some clinics have “pee in a cup” tests. Tests for chlamydia are done even if there are no symptoms.
- Many doctors do not test for chlamydia unless you ask. Getting a Pap smear doesn’t mean you’ve been tested for chlamydia and other STDs. Be sure to ask for a test.
- Get a chlamydia test each time you have a new sex partner. Get tested together.

How is chlamydia treated?

- Chlamydia is cured by taking special antibiotics. Penicillin will **not** get rid of the germ that causes chlamydia.
- It is important to take pills exactly as prescribed.

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For more information, or to report a chlamydia case, call the Whatcom County Health Department at (360) 676-6724.



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- Don't have sex until your doctor says you are cured.
- You can get chlamydia more than once. You can get it again if you have sex with a partner who has not been tested and treated.
- Remember, your partners can have the disease and have no symptoms.
- To be cured:
 1. Don't stop treatment just because you feel better.
 2. Don't have sex until your doctor tells you it is safe.
 3. If your doctor tells you to come back to the clinic or call, do so.

How can I avoid chlamydia?

- One sure way is to abstain from sex. This means not having sex with anyone.
- Sexual fidelity is another way. This means that two people share their sex lives only with each other....neither partner has sex with anyone else. A couple who practices sexual fidelity will not get chlamydia if they are both free of the disease from the start.
- When people are drunk or high it is hard to make safe choices about having sex. Not using alcohol or street drugs is a very important part of preventing chlamydia.
- People who choose not to abstain or practice fidelity must be responsible for protecting themselves from infection.

To help prevent chlamydia:

- Know that it often has no symptoms.
- Know that birth control pills do not prevent infection.
- Have fewer sex partners or don't have sex at all.
- Know your sex partners—go with them for tests, learn to talk about protecting yourselves from infections.

- Change the ways you have sex so there is no risk of infection.
- Learn how to talk about condoms (rubbers) with your sex partners.
- Learn the right way to use condoms.
- Always use a new latex condom.

Condoms can help prevent disease. They protect you from infection when used the right way, but they are not 100% effective.

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