

Chlamydia infection, Causes, symptoms, prevention and treatment

Chlamydia is a very common sexually transmitted infection among adolescents and young adults. It is caused by a bacteria known as Chlamydia trichomatis

The majority of the infected people do not show any signs and symptoms or may show mild symptoms. Due to this reason, the number of people who report to the healthcare facility is lower than the people with the infection.

Once somebody has gotten infected by Chlamydia and has not received any treatment, the infection can spread and affect other body parts causing long-term health issues and permanent damage to the female reproductive system.

Chlamydia infection can infect both men and women but it is more common in females than males.

How does one get Chlamydia?

Chlamydia is spread through having unprotected sexual intercourse. This can be either vaginal, oral, or anal sex.

It can be transmitted even if ejaculation or release of sperms by the male counterpart does not happen.

If a person has been infected before and received treatment, he/she can get reinfected again once he/she has a sexual encounter with an infected partner.

How common is Chlamydia?

Chlamydia infection is among the leading sexually transmitted diseases among youths and young adults.

It occurs more commonly in females than their male counterparts.

The most affected age bracket is adolescents and young adults who are between 15 to 24 years old.

From research, it has been shown that one in every fifteen females aged between 15-24 years who are sexually active have had Chlamydia.

Men who engage in sex with other men are at a higher risk of developing the disease.

Who is at risk of developing Chlamydia?

People, who are at risk of developing the infection are?

- Sexually active adolescents or youth
- Men who engage in sexual encounters with other men
- People with multiple sexual partners
- People who engage in unprotected sex

What are the signs and symptoms of Chlamydia?

Like we mentioned in the introduction, most people who have been infected with Chlamydia do not show any signs and symptoms. Therefore, Chlamydia is also regarded as a silent disease.

After infection, one may start noticing these symptoms after several weeks or months.

These symptoms in men are;

- A burning sensation while urinating
- White or watery discharge from the penis
- Pain and swelling of the testicles (epididymitis)

In women, the common symptoms are;

- Increased vaginal discharge
- Burning sensation on urination
- Pain during or after sexual intercourse
- Pain in the lower abdomen mostly during sexual intercourse
- Experiencing heavy periods or bleeding between menstrual periods

In women, the bacteria start by infecting the cervix which is an area that connects the womb with the birth canal(vagina).

If the infection is not treated promptly, it passes to the womb and infects the womb together with the fallopian tubes causing what is known as a pelvic inflammatory disease that may later complicate to infertility or inability to get pregnant.

This disease can infect the rectum in those men who engage in anal sex. And cause rectal pain or inflammation of the rectal region known as proctitis.

In medical terms, In adults chlamydia presents with urethritis, epididymitis, cervicitis, pelvic inflammatory disease, conjunctivitis, oropharyngeal infection, lymphogranuloma venerium, and reactive arthritis.

In children, it can present with conjunctivitis, trachoma, pneumonia, or urogenital infection.

How can I prevent chlamydia?

Chlamydia infection can be prevented by correctly and consistently using male or female latex condoms whenever one engages in sexual intercourse. This will reduce the chances of getting or infecting your partner.

The best way to prevent it is to abstain from anal, vaginal, or oral sex.

Be in a monogamous relationship by reducing the number of sexual partners and be faithful to your partner.

Regularly get tested and screened for chlamydia even when you do not show any signs or symptoms.

Do not use or share sex toys because they can be a medium of transmission of the bacteria.

How is testing for chlamydia carried out?

If you suspect that you may be having chlamydia or when going for a regular checkup, your healthcare provider will request you to bring a urine sample or perform a swab from the infected region then the sample is examined in a laboratory.

This testing procedure is painless and doesn't hurt at all.

Self-testing kits are also available for home testing.

If the test comes about positive, it is good for your sexual partner also to get tested as soon as possible.

The available tests for chlamydia are;

- Serology tests
- Culture tests and
- Nuclear and amplification tests

How is chlamydia treated?

Chlamydia infection is treated using drugs known as antibiotics. The recommended antibiotics to use are azithromycin or doxycycline.

These drugs work by killing the responsible bacteria.

Usually, azithromycin is taken as one gram in a single dose, and doxycycline is taken as 100 milligrams twice a day for seven days.

During this time of treatment, you are encouraged to avoid sexual intercourse seven days after the treatment, and until your partner finishes the treatment.

You need to remember that once you have been infected by chlamydia you can also be reinfected because your body doesn't develop any immunity against the infection.

What are the complications of chlamydia?

Untreated chlamydia can lead to the development of:

Pelvic inflammatory disease

Ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus)

Permanent damage to the female reproductive organs

Infants who get infected through their mothers develop ophthalmia neonatorum or conjunctivitis.

Infertility or inability to get pregnant

Reactive arthritis (joint inflammation) in men and women.

Having a chlamydia infection increases one's risk of developing HIV. Therefore, it is important that whenever you get a chlamydia test you also get an HIV test done.