

## What to Know About Chlamydia

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*.

Chlamydia is the most common bacterial cause of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the US. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 4 million people in the US develop new chlamydia infections each year, and nearly two-thirds occur in young people aged 15 to 24 years.

Chlamydia is acquired through genital, anal, or oral sex with someone who has chlamydia. Pregnant individuals can transmit chlamydia to their newborns during passage through the birth canal.

### Signs and Symptoms of Chlamydia

Chlamydia infection is usually asymptomatic. When symptoms occur, they may include burning or pain with urination, increased discharge from the vagina or penis, pain in the testicles, and testicular swelling. When chlamydia infects the rectum, it may cause anal discharge, rectal bleeding, and painful bowel movements. Chlamydia infection of the eye can cause conjunctivitis (pink eye). People with chlamydia may also develop painful joints and swollen lymph nodes.

### Diagnosis and Testing for Chlamydia

Chlamydia is diagnosed by testing a sample taken from affected body sites, such as a urine sample or a swab of the vagina or rectum.

Individuals with signs or symptoms of chlamydia should avoid sex and seek testing from a clinician, an STI clinic, or a health department. Because infection with chlamydia is usually asymptomatic, it is important to screen people who are at high risk of infection but have no symptoms. The CDC recommends at least annual screening for all sexually active women younger than 25 years and for those 25 years or older with risk factors such as a new sex partner, multiple sex partners, or known exposure to an STI. Screening for chlamydia should also be performed for all pregnant people younger than 25 years and for pregnant people who are 25 years or older and at increased risk of infection (those who have a new or more than 1 sex partner). People with HIV and men who have sex with men should be routinely screened for chlamydia. Other sexually active young men may be screened if there are high rates of chlamydia infection in their community.

### Why Is It Important to Treat Chlamydia?

Chlamydia infection increases the risk of HIV infection and transmission. Additionally, untreated chlamydia infection can lead to infection of the uterus and fallopian tubes (pelvic inflammatory disease), which may increase the risk of infertility, chronic pelvic pain, and ectopic pregnancy. Individuals with chlamydia infection during pregnancy have an increased

**What is chlamydia?**  
Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*. It can be acquired through genital, anal, or oral sex, and may be passed to an infant during childbirth.

<p><b>Risk factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under 25 years of age</li> <li>• Having a new sexual partner</li> <li>• Having multiple sexual partners</li> <li>• HIV infection</li> </ul>	<p><b>Prevention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use latex condoms during any sexual activity</li> <li>• Limit number of sexual partners</li> <li>• Avoid anonymous sex</li> <li>• Get screened if you are at high risk</li> </ul>
<p><b>Symptoms</b></p> <p><b>Urogenital</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain or burning during urination</li> <li>• Discharge from the vagina or penis</li> <li>• Pain or swelling in the testes</li> </ul> <p><b>Rectal and anal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rectal bleeding or anal discharge</li> <li>• Painful bowel movements</li> </ul> <p><b>Other</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conjunctivitis (pink eye)</li> <li>• Joint pain and swollen lymph nodes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Treatment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral antibiotics</li> <li>• Abstinence from sex for at least 1 week after treatment</li> <li>• Resume sex only with partners who have tested negative or have also been treated</li> </ul> <p><i>Repeat infections are common, and retesting approximately 3 months after completing treatment is recommended.</i></p>

risk of premature delivery. Newborns who acquire chlamydia infection during delivery can develop conjunctivitis and pneumonia.

### How Is Chlamydia Treated?

Chlamydia infection is treated with antibiotics. Depending on the antibiotic, treatment may be given as a single dose or prescribed for 7 days. Patients should not have sex for at least 1 week after starting treatment and until all their sex partners have also been tested and treated for chlamydia. Because repeat infections are common, individuals diagnosed with chlamydia should be retested about 3 months after completing treatment of their initial infection.

### How to Reduce the Spread of Chlamydia

Sexually active individuals can decrease their risk of acquiring and transmitting chlamydia by using latex condoms with all sexual activity (including oral, anal, and vaginal sex), limiting the number of sexual partners, and avoiding anonymous sex.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

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**Sources:** Dombrowski JC. Chlamydia and gonorrhea. *Ann Intern Med.* 2021;174(10):ITC145-ITC160. doi:10.7326/AITC202110190  
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