

Chlamydia – what is it?

Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in Australia, particularly among young people aged between 16 and 29. It is serious for both men and women.

How do you get chlamydia?

Chlamydia is caused by bacterium and can be passed on by unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex with an infected person. Pregnant women can pass chlamydia on to their babies, causing serious eye and lung infections. If you have chlamydia, it's also easier to both catch and pass on HIV.

The trouble is, most people don't realise they have chlamydia because they don't see or feel anything wrong. Without knowing it, they can pass it on to their partners. You are most at risk of chlamydia if:

- you're under 29
- you've changed sex partners in the last six months
- you've had more than one sex partner in the last six months
- you don't use condoms or dental dams
- you or your sex partner has another STI.

What are the signs and symptoms of chlamydia?

Females

Most females who have chlamydia don't notice any signs at all, others notice:

- burning or pain when passing urine
- unusual vaginal discharge
- pain in the lower belly
- pain during sex
- unusual bleeding or spotting between periods.

Without early treatment, females can get infections in their cervix, uterus (womb) and fallopian tubes. This is called Pelvic Inflammatory Disease. This can scar or even block the fallopian tubes (which carry eggs to the womb). It can also prevent a fertilised egg from getting into the uterus, causing an ectopic pregnancy (when the egg grows in the fallopian tube). This requires emergency surgery and can be fatal.

Males

Most males who have chlamydia don't notice any signs at all, others notice:

- whitish or yellow discharge from the penis
- burning or pain when passing urine
- irritation or soreness around the urethra (the opening of the penis).

Without early treatment, men can develop prostatitis (infection and swelling of the prostate gland), epididymitis (swelling in the testicles) and infertility.

CHLAMYDIA

Most people haven't got a clue

www.couldihaveit.com.au

How do I know if I have chlamydia?

If you have any of these symptoms – or if you are having unprotected sex and don't know if your sex partner has an infection – visit your doctor as soon as possible and ask for an STI check-up.

Testing for chlamydia is easy and painless. For males, your doctor will take a sample of urine and for females a swab taken from the vagina which, if you prefer, you can do yourself. Your doctor should also talk to you about partner notification. Partner notification involves contacting your recent, usual and/or casual sex partner so they too can get counselling, testing, and treatment if necessary.

How do I get treated?

If you have chlamydia you will need antibiotics and must take them all. Your sex partners also need to get tested and treated. Don't have unsafe sex while you or your partner are taking the treatment. You could infect each other again. Do not drink alcohol during treatment. The alcohol stops the medicine from working properly and it may cause you to forget about having safe sex. It is important to be re-tested for chlamydia three months after treatment to ensure that you have not been re-infected.

How do I reduce the risks of getting chlamydia?

The safest ways to protect against chlamydia and other STIs are to:

- Always use condoms or dental dams and water based lubricant. Condoms are the best way to protect you both from chlamydia and other STIs. Always use condoms during vaginal and anal sex and dental dams during oral sex, until you're totally sure that both you and your partner don't have an STI.
- Limit your sex partners. The fewer people you have sex with, the less chance you have of having sex with someone who has chlamydia.
- Have regular STI checks.

Talking about STIs can be difficult, but any person you have sex with has a right to know if you have an STI. Discuss it when you're feeling relaxed and confident, not just before you have sex. Your partner will appreciate your honesty and that you don't want to infect him/her. You have the right to know if they're infected, too.

Where can I find more information on chlamydia?

- Your doctor
- www.couldihaveit.com.au
- *healthdirect* Australia: ☎ 1800 022 222
- Sexual Health Helpline: ☎ 9227 6178 metro callers or 1800 198 205 for country callers.