

Chlamydia

Facts You Need to Know

- ◆ Chlamydia is the most frequently reported infectious disease in the U.S. There are an estimated 3 million new infections each year.
- ◆ With early diagnosis and antibiotic treatment, chlamydia can be cured. However, because it usually has no signs or symptoms—especially in its early stages—many women don't realize they are infected.
- ◆ Approximately 75 percent of all infected women and half of all infected men have no early symptoms. Most cases are detected by regular screening of at-risk populations.
- ◆ If chlamydia goes untreated, serious damage can occur. Men can develop inflammation of the testicles. Women can develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can result in infertility or tubal pregnancy.
- ◆ Pregnant women with chlamydia can pass the infection to their babies during birth. Chlamydia can seriously harm a baby's eyes and lungs.
- ◆ A person with chlamydia is at greater risk for getting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Who's Likely to Get Chlamydia?

- ◆ Adolescent girls have high rates of chlamydia. Changes in the cervix that occur in puberty make them especially vulnerable.
- ◆ At least 1.5 million new cases of chlamydia occur each year in young people aged 15–24. These make up over half of all new cases.
- ◆ On average, young women with chlamydia go untreated for a year. While, for young men, the average is five months.
- ◆ Men who have sex with men (MSM) are also at risk for chlamydia.



How Is Chlamydia Transmitted?

- ◆ Chlamydia is spread through intercourse, when sexual fluids containing the bacteria come in contact with mucous membranes.
- ◆ The risk of getting chlamydia increases with the number of sex partners—and with unprotected sex.

Costs and Consequences

- ◆ The direct medical costs of chlamydia are nearly \$250 million each year. Adding in the cost of complications, such as PID, the amount is as high as \$24 billion dollars a year.
- ◆ Forty-percent of women with untreated chlamydia develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a complication that can cause infertility, chronic pain and tubal pregnancy.
- ◆ Chlamydia is the leading preventable cause of infertility in the U.S.

Prevention and Treatment Basics

- ◆ Outside of sexual abstinence, the surest way to avoid getting chlamydia is to refrain from sexual contact with an infected person or to be in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected person.
- ◆ Correct and consistent use of condoms can reduce the rate of chlamydial transmission. However, condom use cannot guarantee absolute protection.
- ◆ Urine tests can diagnose chlamydia, as can cervical, vaginal and penile (urethral) swabs.
- ◆ Chlamydia can be cured by antibiotics. Most medicines need to be taken every day for at least a week, but there is also single-dose therapy that can cure the infection.

Public Health and Policy Issues

- ◆ In geographic areas where major screening programs do exist, cases of chlamydia have significantly declined. In addition, programs that offer treatment to partners of chlamydia patients have reduced the risk of re-infection.
- ◆ CDC recommends that sexually active women between the ages of 15 and 25 be tested every year for chlamydia, even if there are no symptoms. Annual screening is also recommended for older women who have a new sex partner or multiple sex partners.
- ◆ STD and family planning programs are in need of funds for a number of initiatives:
 - ◆ More comprehensive programs that include screening and re-screening of young, sexually active women.
 - ◆ Wider screening of men.
 - ◆ Implementation of comprehensive partner management strategies to prevent re-infection of women.