

## ***Chlamydia***

### ***What is it?***

Among the more than 20 STDs that have now been identified, Chlamydia is the most frequently reported, with an estimated 4 million new cases nationwide each year. For 2009, Tennessee had 11,519 diagnosed cases of Chlamydia. Chlamydia infections are caused by a bacterium, *Chlamydia trachomatis*, and are transmitted during vaginal, oral or anal sexual contact with an infected partner. It can also spread from an infected pregnant woman to her child at birth.

### ***What are the symptoms?***

About three-fourths of infected women and about one half of infected men may have no symptoms at all. This is one reason Chlamydia is dangerous: asymptomatic individuals do not seek treatment and therefore can pass the infection on to others. If symptoms appear at all, it is usually one to three weeks after contact. Women report vaginal discharge, vaginal bleeding between periods, abdominal pain that is sometimes accompanied by fever and nausea, and burning or pain during urination. Men with the infection report burning or pain during urination and a discharge from the penis. If left untreated, individuals can develop complications from the infection.

### ***What kinds of complications can Chlamydia cause?***

In women, Chlamydia can result in pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a serious complication that can cause both infertility and ectopic pregnancy among women of childbearing age. The infection also may be passed by a pregnant woman to her newborn baby during delivery, resulting in neonatal eye infection or pneumonia. In men, Chlamydia infections can lead to pain or swelling in the scrotum. This can be a sign of epididymitis, an inflammation of a part of the male reproductive system located in the testicles. Both PID and epididymitis can cause infertility.

Other complications include proctitis (inflamed rectum) and conjunctivitis (inflammation of the lining of the eye). A particular strain of Chlamydia causes another STD called *lymphogranuloma venereum*, which causes major swelling and inflammation of the lymph nodes in the groin. Also, because of the symptoms associated with Chlamydia, infected individuals have a 3 to 5 times increase in the risk of acquiring HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) if exposed to the virus during sexual intercourse.

To help prevent the serious consequences of Chlamydia, screening at least annually for Chlamydia is recommended for all sexually active women age 25 years and younger. An annual screening test also is recommended for older women with risk factors for Chlamydia (a new sex partner or multiple sex partners). All pregnant women should have a screening test for Chlamydia.

### *How is Chlamydia diagnosed?*

Several new tests for diagnosing Chlamydia have been developed recently. These tests are inexpensive and the results are available within two to three days. These new tests detect genetic material from Chlamydia and are very accurate. Urine, as well as genital secretions, can be collected as a specimen for these new test methods.

### *How is Chlamydia treated?*

Chlamydia infections are treated with a seven-day course of antibiotics, usually doxycycline or erythromycin. A single dose of azithromycin also effectively treats Chlamydia infections. Penicillin is not effective against Chlamydia.

A person must be sure to take all of the prescribed medication, even if symptoms disappear before taking all the antibiotics. An infected person should refrain from all sexual contact until completing the medication, and it is very important that all sex partners be tested and treated to prevent possible medical complications, re-infection and further spread of the disease.

Women whose sex partners have not been appropriately treated are at high risk for re-infection. Retesting should be considered for women, especially adolescents, three to four months after treatment. This is especially true if a woman does not know if her sex partner received treatment.

### *How can Chlamydia be prevented?*

Not having sex is the best protection against Chlamydia and other STDs. Having sex with only one uninfected partner who only has sex with you is also safe.

### *How can I reduce my risk of getting Chlamydia?*

The use of latex condoms during sexual intercourse when always and correctly used can reduce the risk of transmission of Chlamydia. Because Chlamydia is highly contagious and yet may cause no symptoms, all men and women who have sexual contact with more than one partner should be tested regularly for the disease. Constant awareness and protection are necessary because a person who has once contracted the disease does not become immune. Many people acquire Chlamydia more than once.

**For more information about STDs, talk to your health care provider or call:**

**The State of Tennessee HIV/STD Hotline: 1-800-525-2437**

**(Monday through Friday 8:00 to 4:30 p.m. CST)**

**OR**

**The CDC National STD Hotline: 1-800-227-8922**

**Other Informational Links:**

**American Social Health Association**

<http://www.ashastd.org/>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

<http://www.cdc.gov/STD/>

**E-Cards, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

<http://www2c.cdc.gov/ecards/index.asp?category=174>

**Get Yourself Tested**

<http://www.gytnow.org/>

**National Institute of Health Medline**

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html>

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/sexually-transmitted-infections.cfm>

**World Health Organization**

[http://www.who.int/topics/sexually\\_transmitted\\_infections/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/sexually_transmitted_infections/en/)