

Chlamydia

What is it?
How is it transmitted?
How is it treated?

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What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a very common sexually transmitted infection caused by a bacteria. It is easily transmitted but also easily treated and cured by antibiotics; if left untreated it can cause painful complications and serious health problems.

How is chlamydia transmitted?

The infection is most commonly spread through:

- Unprotected vaginal, anal and oral sex
- Sharing sex toys
- Infected semen or vaginal fluid coming into contact with the eyes causing conjunctivitis
- From an infected pregnant woman to her baby

What are the signs and symptoms?

Around 70% of women and 50% of men will have no obvious signs or symptoms. Any symptoms can take weeks or months to appear.

Symptoms to be aware of:

Women:

- Bleeding between periods and/or heavier periods (even whilst on hormonal contraception)
- Pain and/or bleeding after sex
- Pelvic pain
- Unusual discharge
- Pain when passing urine

Men:

- A white/cloudy/watery discharge from the tip of the penis
- Pain when passing urine
- Pain in the testicles

There are rarely any symptoms if the infection is in the rectum (but it may cause discomfort and discharge). Infection in the eyes can cause pain, swelling, irritation and discharge.

Where can I get a test?

Sexual Health Sheffield offers free chlamydia testing and treatment. The test will also screen for gonorrhoea (another STI).

If you are aged 16-24 you can get a free postal testing kit sent directly to your home from our website: bit.ly/testingkit

You can also get a kit by texting CLEAR WS to 80010 with your name, address, postcode and whether you are male or female.

What is the test?

Women:

- A self-taken vaginal swab either at clinic or via a postal kit

Men and Women:

- A urine sample
- If you have had anal or oral sex, a swab may be used to collect cells from your rectum or throat for testing. If you have conjunctivitis symptoms, swabs will also be used to collect cells from the eyes.

(Please note – cervical screening tests and routine blood tests do NOT detect chlamydia)

What is the treatment for chlamydia?

Standard treatment is a single dose of antibiotic administered in clinic. Sometimes a longer course is needed which takes one to three weeks depending on the site of infection. Patients who are at high risk are often started on the course of treatment before the test results are back. Treatment is always given if your partner is found to have the infection. You may also need other treatment if there are complications. Inform the doctor or nurse if you are pregnant or think you are.

When will the signs and symptoms go away?

You should notice an improvement quite quickly:

- Discharge or pain when urinating should improve within 1 week
- Bleeding between periods or heavier periods should improve by your next period
- Pelvic pain and pain in the testicles should start to improve quickly but may take up to 2 weeks to stop

If pelvic pain or painful sex does not improve see the doctor or nurse, as it could be necessary to have further tests or different treatment.

What if chlamydia is left untreated?

If chlamydia is treated early, it is unlikely to cause any long term problems. However, without proper treatment the infection can spread to other parts of the body and cause long term health problems. The more times you get chlamydia the higher the likelihood of complications.

In women, chlamydia can spread to other reproductive organs causing: Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), long term pelvic pain, blocked fallopian tubes, infertility and pregnancy complications. It can also spread to the liver causing pain and inflammation.

In men, chlamydia can lead to infection in the testicles leading to a reduction in fertility.

In men and women, chlamydia can lead to inflammation of the joints (arthritis).

Can I still have sex?

If you have unprotected sex with a partner within 1 week of taking the treatment, you may pass chlamydia on. The advice is to use a condom for anal or vaginal sex or a dam for oral sex or to avoid sex for 7 days after taking the treatment.

Should I tell my partner(s)?

If the test shows that you have chlamydia then it is very important that your current sexual partner and any other recent partners are also tested and treated. Sexual Health Sheffield will help with this and your confidentiality is protected.

Re-testing

if you have been diagnosed with chlamydia, you will be offered a re-test 3 months after your treatment to make sure you have not been re-infected.

What if I get chlamydia whilst pregnant?

- Chlamydia can be passed to the baby during birth, causing inflammation and discharge in the baby's eyes and/or pneumonia
- Chlamydia can be treated with antibiotics whilst you are pregnant or breastfeeding; inform the doctor or nurse that you are pregnant as it will affect the type of antibiotic used

How can I protect myself from chlamydia and other sexually transmitted infections?

The following measures can help to protect you from chlamydia and most other sexually transmitted infections, such as genital warts and gonorrhoea. If you have a sexually transmitted infection they will also help prevent you from passing it on to your partner(s):

- Use condoms every time you have vaginal or anal sex
- If you have oral sex, use a condom to cover the penis, or a dam to cover the anus or female genitals
- Any genital to genital contact between partners could pass on STIs. Using dams or condoms before sexual contact can help prevent infection
- If you are not sure how to use condoms correctly visit **www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk**
- Avoid sharing sex toys. If you do share them, wash or sterilise them or cover them with a new condom before anyone else uses them
- Arrange regular HIV/STI check-ups, especially at change/start of relationships with new sexual partners

What happens at Sexual Health Sheffield?

When you attend for your appointment, you will be asked to provide the following:

- Your name and how we can contact you - any details you provide will be treated confidentially
- During your visit you will be asked personal information so we can provide the relevant and appropriate care
- We have a duty of care to all our patients, so if you are 17 or under you will be asked relevant questions to assess your safety. If staff are concerned, they may talk to you about what to do about this

and may contact other appropriate agencies. Sexual Health Sheffield will not tell your parents or carers that you have visited Sexual Health Sheffield

This is the service you can expect when you attend Sexual Health Sheffield:

- All advice, information, tests, condoms and treatments are free at Sexual Health Sheffield
- No one should judge you because of your sexual behaviour or lifestyle
- All our services are confidential
- All Sexual Health Sheffield workers are appropriately and fully trained NHS staff
- All tests are optional; no examination will take place without your permission
- Please ask questions to ensure you fully understand what services have been offered, what tests carried out and what treatments given
- You can have a chaperone to help you feel more comfortable – please ask
- Our friendly and professional staff are here to help you. We will give you as much support as you need (particularly if you need help on how to inform any partners)

If you feel that we have not met the above or want to give us any other feedback, please contact us via:

www.sth.nhs.uk/patients/tell-us-what-you-think

Further information

www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk
0114 226 8888

NHS Choices website:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/Sexually-transmitted-infections/Pages/Introduction.aspx



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