

# Chlamydia

## Information Sheet

### **What is it?**

Chlamydia is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). It is caused by bacteria. The bacteria infect the cervix, urethra and other reproduction organs. Chlamydia is easy to treat and can be cured.

### **How is it spread?**

Chlamydia is spread through unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected person. Sometimes, Chlamydia can be spread to the eyes by hands or direct contact with the infected areas. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during birth. A person continues to have the infection and can pass it on until he or she finishes treatment.

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

Approximately 80 percent of women and 50 percent of men infected with Chlamydia have no symptoms. They can unknowingly pass the infection on to their sexual partner(s). If present, symptoms may appear 2-6 weeks after contact with the infection.

Women may have itching or discharge from the vagina. They may also have bleeding during or after sexual intercourse, bleeding or spotting between menstrual periods, pain in the lower abdomen or pain when passing urine.

Men may have discharge and itching around the urethra or penis. The urethra is the opening in the penis. They may also have burning when they pass urine, or pain and swelling in the testicles.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

In women, a test can be done by taking a swab from the cervix. The cervix is the opening to the womb or uterus. In men, a swab is taken from the urethra. Men should not pass urine for 2 hours before the test. Some clinics may use a urine test. It is hard to detect Chlamydia in the throat or rectum.

### **What are the complications?**

Untreated Chlamydia in women may lead to a condition called pelvic inflammatory disease. Pelvic inflammatory disease is also known as PID. It is a serious infection of the lining of the womb or uterus, the fallopian tubes and the ovaries. Sometimes the fallopian tubes of a woman with PID are blocked by scar tissue and her eggs cannot pass through. When this happens, she may not be able to get pregnant. If the fallopian tubes are only partly blocked so that sperm can pass through, she may have a pregnancy inside the fallopian tube. This is called an ectopic pregnancy. Women with untreated Chlamydia may also have miscarriages.

Men with untreated Chlamydia may become sterile when the tubes carrying the sperm are blocked by scar tissue. They may have swelling and pain in their testicles. This is a condition called epididymitis. Some men may also develop arthritis.

Infants who are born to mothers with untreated Chlamydia may become ill with pneumonia or eye infections.

How is it treated?

Chlamydia is treated with antibiotic pills. Some of the commonly used antibiotics include Azithromycin, Doxycycline, and Amoxicillin. It is important that you complete the treatment as directed by your doctor or clinic. Even if your symptoms have disappeared, you must finish all the pills to make sure that you are cured. If you have PID or epididymitis, you may need to go into a hospital and be treated with intravenous antibiotics.

**What about sexual partners?**

All sexual partners within the past 3 months should be examined and treated. If you have not had sex in the past three months, your last sexual partner should be examined and treated. Tell your partner(s) that having no symptoms does not mean there is no infection. Your Public Health Nurse can help you to notify your partner(s). Your name will be kept confidential.

**Is follow-up important?**

It is a good idea to have a follow-up test 4 weeks after you have completed the treatment to make sure that you are cured.

**Remember:**

- ✓ Take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor or clinic
- ✓ Avoid sex while you and your sexual partner(s) are being treated. You can get reinfected every time you have sex with an untreated or infected partner.
- ✓ Use condoms to lower the chance of getting STDs and to prevent pregnancy
- ✓ It is possible to have more than one infection at a time, so it is important to be tested for other STDs
- ✓ If you are taking the Birth Control Pill, use an additional form of birth control while taking antibiotics and for at least 7 days after you finish your antibiotic pills.