

What is Chlamydia

- Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*
- It is the most common reportable STI in Canada and disproportionately affects women aged 15-24
 - In 2020, there were 14110 reported cases of chlamydia in Alberta, with cases rising steadily since 1997
- Chlamydia is transmitted through vaginal, anal, and oral sex
- It initially infects the urethra and cervix, and can spread to the upper female reproductive organs, leading to serious complications such as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and infertility
- An infected pregnant person can also transmit chlamydia to their baby, which can result in premature birth or pneumonia in the newborn

What are the symptoms of Chlamydia?

- More than 50% of males and 70% of females infected with chlamydia will have no symptoms
 - However, asymptomatic chlamydia can still be transmitted to others and can lead to serious health problems
- If symptoms occur, they are different in males and females
 - In females, symptoms can include vaginal discharge, burning sensation when urinating, pain in the lower abdomen, painful intercourse, and abnormal vaginal bleeding
 - In males, symptoms can include discharge from the penis, burning sensation when urinating, burning or itching at the opening of the penis, and pain or swelling in the testicles
 - In both males and females, chlamydia can infect the rectum, causing pain, bleeding, and discharge.
- In up to 40% of infected females, untreated chlamydia can lead to PID
 - The symptoms of PID include abdominal pain, fever, and pelvic pain
 - Scarring of the fallopian tubes can occur, resulting in infertility and increasing the risk of ectopic pregnancy
 - In males, scarring of the urethra may occur, which can impair urination and cause infertility

How is Chlamydia diagnosed?

- Because chlamydia may not have any symptoms, the only reliable way to know if you have this STI is to be tested
- Routine testing is recommended in sexually active people under 25 and pregnant people, as well as anyone with risk factors for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection
- Chlamydia is diagnosed by a doctor via medical history, a physical examination, and lab tests
- Testing is done in a doctors office via a urine sample or swabbing the infected area. Your doctor will also send a report to your provincial or territorial health unit

How is Chlamydia treated?

- Chlamydia can be cured using antibiotics (usually doxycycline or azithromycin) and does not cause long-term problems if treated early
- After the start of chlamydia treatment, you should not have sex for 7 days
- Reinfection can occur, and repeated infections increase the risk of PID
- Your physician may recommend retesting 3-6 months after treatment
- To prevent chlamydia, practice safer sex by limiting your sex partners, knowing whether your partner engages in risky sexual behaviours, and use a condom or dental dam during sex

References:

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