



# Chlamydia

## What is Chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*. It primarily affects young people aged 15–24 and is transmitted through vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Because chlamydia can be asymptomatic, regular testing is essential for early detection and treatment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2023a).

## Signs and Symptoms

### Penis owners may experience:

- Painful urination
- Discharge from the penis
- Pain and swelling in one or both testicles (rare) (Mayo Clinic, 2023)

### Vulva owners may experience:

- Abnormal vaginal discharge
- Burning sensation during urination
- Pain during intercourse or bleeding between periods (CDC, 2023a)

### Rectal Infection Symptoms (in both penis and vulva owners):

- Rectal pain, discharge, and bleeding (American Sexual Health Association [ASHA], 2023)

**Note:** Up to 70–90% of vulva owners and 50% of penis owners with chlamydia may not exhibit symptoms, making regular testing important for sexually active individuals (CDC, 2023a).

## Incubation Period

Chlamydia symptoms usually appear within 1 to 3 weeks after exposure but may take longer, especially in cases that remain asymptomatic (Mayo Clinic, 2023).

## Transmission

Chlamydia is transmitted through vaginal, anal, or oral sex with an infected person. It can also be passed from an infected mother to their baby during childbirth, potentially causing serious eye or lung infections in newborns (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

## Complications of Untreated Chlamydia

- **Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID):** In vulva owners, untreated chlamydia can spread to the uterus and fallopian tubes, causing PID, which can lead to infertility, chronic pelvic pain, and an increased risk of ectopic pregnancy (Planned Parenthood, 2023).
- **Epididymitis:** In penis owners, chlamydia can infect the epididymis, causing pain and, in some cases, infertility (CDC, 2023b).
- **Reiter's Syndrome:** A rare complication involving joint pain, eye inflammation, and urinary tract issues can occur in both penis and vulva owners due to untreated chlamydia (WHO, 2023).

## Prevention

### 1. Consistent Use of Condoms and Dental Dams:

- Condoms and dental dams are effective in reducing the risk of chlamydia transmission when used correctly during all forms of sexual activity (ASHA, 2023).

### 2. Open Communication with Sexual Partners:

- Discuss STI testing with partners and how to address potential STI exposures (Planned Parenthood, 2023).



## Chlamydia

### 3. Regular Screening:

- The CDC recommends annual chlamydia screening for all sexually active individuals. Regular testing helps detect infections early and prevent complications (CDC, 2023b; WHO, 2023).

### Testing and Treatment

- **Testing:** Chlamydia can be diagnosed through urine tests or swabs from the cervix, urethra, throat, or rectum, depending on the exposure site.
- **Treatment:** Chlamydia is treated with antibiotics, usually azithromycin or doxycycline. It's essential to complete the prescribed medication, even if symptoms improve, and to abstain from sexual activity until treatment is complete to prevent reinfection (Mayo Clinic, 2023).

**Note:** Sexual partners should be tested and treated simultaneously to avoid reinfection, and follow-up testing is recommended about three months after treatment (CDC, 2023a).

### Key Takeaways

- Chlamydia is preventable through safe sex practices, regular screenings, and open communication with sexual partners.
- Early detection and treatment can prevent serious health complications, including infertility and chronic pain.
- Abstinence from sexual activity during treatment helps prevent reinfection and allows for full recovery.

**For additional information on chlamydia prevention, symptoms, and treatment options, consult a healthcare provider or visit reliable health sources.**

### References

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