

Chlamydia trachomatis Infection

Chlamydia trachomatis infection, caused by a bacterium, is the most common sexually transmitted infection in Australia. It occurs in both men and women, though up to 25% of infected men and 70% of infected women may not have any symptoms, and may not know they have the infection. This doesn't mean the infection is trivial. Also, having any sexually transmitted infection increases the risk of getting HIV infection if you are exposed to HIV while another infection is present.

In men, *Chlamydia* may produce a urethritis (infection of the urethra, the urinary canal leading from the bladder to exit at the tip of the penis). A discharge from the penis may be present but many infections have no symptoms. Occasionally, infection may spread to the epididymis (storage tubes for sperm overlying the testes in the testicle), which can be very painful and may lead to infertility.

Although most infected women are without symptoms, it is women who suffer the most serious consequences of genital *Chlamydia* infections. In women, the cervix (opening of the uterus at the top of the vagina) becomes infected. From the cervix, the infection may spread to the fallopian tubes, which are tubes leading from the ovary to the uterus, causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Pelvic inflammatory disease due to *Chlamydia* is often without symptoms but if untreated may lead to scarring of the fallopian tubes and ectopic (tubal) pregnancy or infertility.

Chlamydia trachomatis can cause conjunctivitis, inflammation of the lining of the eyelids and eye, in both adults and babies. Babies born to infected mothers can become infected as they pass through the infected cervix and may develop conjunctivitis or pneumonia caused by *Chlamydia* soon after birth.

A small proportion of people infected with *Chlamydia trachomatis* develop joint pain.

Having *Chlamydia* infection does not result in immunity, and re-infection is common. It is likely that the most serious complications – infertility, PID and blindness – are the result of repeated infections.

Chlamydia infection is best diagnosed by examination and culture of a sample of cervical or urethral discharge. PCR tests on urine specimens may be used for screening in people without symptoms. The infection cannot be diagnosed from a blood test.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

1 – 3 weeks.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Unknown, probably many months if untreated.

Treatment

Effective antibiotic treatment is available on prescription from a doctor. However, if infertility develops, there is no simple treatment.

Control of spread

- > Practise safer sex.
- > No sex, or use condoms, until antibiotic treatment is completed.
- > A follow-up test must be done to make sure that treatment has cleared the infection.
- > Testing and treatment of sexual partners at the same time.
- > Testing to exclude other sexually transmitted diseases is advisable.



Chlamydia trachomatis infection is a notifiable disease

- > PCR
- > Avoiding Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)

Useful websites

- > Clinic 275
<http://www.stdservices.on.net/>
- > SHine SA
<http://www.shinesa.org.au/go/information-and-resources/choose-a-topic/sexually-transmitted-infections>