

# Chlamydia

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Infections can occur in the penis or external genitals, vagina or internal genitals, anus, throat, and eye. The bacteria can also be found in body fluids such as semen, pre-ejaculate, vaginal fluids, and anal fluids.

Chlamydia can be cured with antibiotics. It is the most commonly reported STI in British Columbia

## Causes

You get chlamydia through vaginal, oral, and anal sexual contact. This includes both penetrative sex and sexual activities where there is an exchange of body fluids. You can also get chlamydia by sharing sex toys. If you have chlamydia, you can pass it to others even if you don't have symptoms.

## Symptoms

If you have chlamydia, it is common to not notice any symptoms. If you do get symptoms, they will most likely show up between 2 and 6 weeks after sexual contact. Your symptoms will depend on where the infection is located. The most common symptoms include:

- **Penis/external genitals:** You may notice abnormal discharge and an unusual, painful, or itchy sensation. You could also have pain or trouble when urinating. If you have testicles you may experience pain there and sometimes a little swelling.
- **Vagina/internal genitals:** You may notice abnormal discharge and bleeding. Other symptoms would be lower abdominal pain and sometimes pain during sex.
- **Anus:** You may notice abnormal discharge. You can also have pain in the area.
- **Throat:** It is rare to have symptoms here but you might experience a sore throat.
- **Eye:** You may notice swelling or abnormal discharge.

*\*Note: If you have had lower surgery, your genital symptoms may vary.*

## Tests and Diagnosis

There are choices for how you test for chlamydia. A health care provider will recommend certain tests depending on the types of sex that you're having. Testing is usually done with a urine sample or a swab of the throat, rectum or vagina.

It is best to get tested for chlamydia if you:

- have symptoms
- have a sexual partner who has tested positive for chlamydia
- are doing routine screening for STIs
- are pregnant
- are going to have an IUD inserted, a surgical abortion, or a gynecological procedure

### **Window Period (how long to wait before testing):**

Most test results are accurate 2 to 6 weeks after you come in contact with chlamydia. In British Columbia, most test results should be ready in 10 days.

## Treatment

Chlamydia is treated with prescription antibiotics. **It is important to take your medications as directed.** If you miss any doses, the infection may not be cured. See your health care provider if this happens or if you still have symptoms after you finish your treatment.

The medications used to treat chlamydia are available for free in BC. Talk to your health care provider to see if they have them in stock.

### After getting treatment

- It is important to not have sex (even with a condom) for 7 days after the start of your treatment. If you do have sex, you could pass chlamydia to your sexual partners or get it again. If this happens, talk to your health care provider.
- Tell your healthcare provider if your symptoms (if any) do not go away, if you did not finish your medication, or if you experienced vomiting after taking medication (in case it did not absorb).
- Before having sex with a recent partner, be sure they started treatment at least 7 days ago. If your partner was not treated (even if they tested negative), they could still have the infection and can pass it back to you
- Retest in 6 months to confirm that there was no re-infection. If you retest sooner, wait at least 4 weeks after completing treatment. This is because dead bacteria may still be detected if you test too soon after treatment. It is sometimes recommended to have a test-of-cure. Talk to your health care provider for their recommendation.

## Sexual Partners

Your sexual partners within the last two months should be tested and treated for chlamydia. If you haven't had sex in the last two months, your last partner should be tested and treated. Recent sexual partners should be treated even if they test negative because it can take up to 6 weeks before an infection can be detected by the test.

There are a few ways to [tell partners](#), talk to your health care provider about what is right for you. Some ways to let sexual partners know to get tested:

- Tell your partners in person or over the phone. It can help if you prepare for this conversation, we've developed some [tips to help talk to partners](#).
- Tell your partners with your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can help answer any questions that you or your partners might have.
- Your healthcare provider might be able to tell your partners for you. They can inform them they have been exposed to an STI and need to get tested without giving your name. Not all providers offer this option.
- Another way to anonymously notify partners is to use an online tool such as [this tool developed by HIM](#), or [TellYourPartner.org](#)

## Complications

If you treat chlamydia early, there are usually no other health problems. If left untreated, it can lead to serious complications including:

- higher chance of getting and passing [HIV](#)
- [pelvic inflammatory disease](#)
- [epididymitis](#)
- infertility
- ectopic pregnancy
- chronic pelvic pain
- reactive arthritis

**Pregnancy:** If you are pregnant, you should be screened for chlamydia. You can pass chlamydia to your child during birth.

The medications used to treat chlamydia are available for free in BC. Talk to your health care provider to see if they have them in stock.

## Prevention

It is a good idea to be tested regularly for STIs, especially if you have new sexual partners or open relationships. Talking with partners about safer sex makes sure everyone knows what to expect. Condoms are great if they work for you – the correct use of condoms reduces your chances of getting and passing chlamydia.

## Resources

**HealthLink BC – Information about chlamydia**

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/chlamydia>

**SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about chlamydia**

<https://newsite.smartsexresource.com/sexual-health/sexuality/sex-mental-health/>

**TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information**

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>