

Lymphogranuloma Venereum (LGV)

Lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV) is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a strain of chlamydia bacteria. Infections usually occur in the lymphatic system in the genital area. The bacteria can also be found in body fluids such as semen, pre-ejaculate, vaginal fluids, and anal fluids.

LGV can be cured with antibiotics. It has historically been rare in BC, but is now becoming more common, especially among men who have sex with men.

Causes

LGV is passed 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 LGV by sharing sex toys. If you have LGV, you can pass it to others even if you don't have symptoms.

Symptoms

It is common to not notice any symptoms with LGV. If you do get symptoms, they will most likely show up between 3 days and 6 weeks after sexual contact. LGV can cause fever, fatigue, and painless sores and swelling of the lymph nodes in the genital area. It can also lead to genital abscesses. Occasionally, LGV can cause symptoms in the joints, lungs, and liver. If you have anal sex, there may be mucous discharge and bleeding from your anus.

Tests and Diagnosis

The diagnosis of LGV can be complicated and is based on symptoms, an exam of any sores or swelling, and a sexual history. Testing is usually done with a swab and a blood sample.

It is best to get tested for LGV if you have symptoms or have a sexual partner who has tested positive for LGV.

Treatment

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

It is important to not have sex (even with a condom) for 3 weeks after starting treatment. If you do have sex during this time, you could pass LGV to your sexual partners or get it again. If this happens, talk to your health care provider.

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

Sexual Partners

If you are diagnosed with LGV, your sexual partners within the last two months should also be tested and treated. If you haven't had sex in the last two months, your last partner should be tested and treated.

There are a few ways to tell partners. You can tell partners yourself or anonymously. Talk to your health care provider about what is right for you.

Complications

If you treat LGV 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
- genital and rectal strictures (closings) and fistulae (openings)
- cardiac involvement, aseptic meningitis, or ocular inflammatory disease

Prevention

It is a good idea to get 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 LGV.

Resources

SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about LGV

<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information

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