



CHLAMYDIA

The Issue

Chlamydia is the most common bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI) in Canada. When left untreated, it can lead to painful health problems and sterility.

Background

After being in decline for many years, rates of chlamydia infection have risen steadily since 1997. These rising rates are an indication that people are not consistently using safer sex methods.

Chlamydia is transmitted through vaginal, anal and oral sex and can be transmitted from mother to child during childbirth. It is known as the 'silent disease', because more than 50 percent of infected males and 70 percent of infected females have no symptoms and are unaware of their condition.

The only reliable way to know if you have chlamydia is to be tested. A urine test is available and there is an effective single-dose antibiotic treatment available to treat the infection.

Symptoms of Chlamydia

As noted above, the majority of infected people have no symptoms of chlamydia, and therefore may not know they are infected unless they get tested. Symptoms of infection for women can include:

- A vaginal discharge
- A burning sensation when urinating

- Pain in the lower abdomen, sometimes with fever and chills
- Pain during sex
- Vaginal bleeding between periods or after intercourse.

Symptoms for men can include:

- A discharge from the penis
- A burning sensation when urinating
- Burning or itching at the opening of the penis
- Pain and/or swelling in the testicles.

Symptoms of anal infection include rectal pain, bleeding and discharge. Those infected through oral sex generally have few symptoms.

If symptoms do occur, they usually appear two to six weeks after infection, but it can take longer for symptoms to appear. Even without symptoms, however, chlamydia can be transmitted and can lead to serious health problems and sterility, especially in women. Anyone at risk should therefore be tested.

The Health Risks of Chlamydia

For up to 40 percent of infected women, untreated chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID effects include abdominal pain, fever, internal abscesses and long-lasting pelvic pain; effects also include scarring of the



fallopian tubes, which can cause infertility and increase the chance of potentially life-threatening ectopic or tubal pregnancies.

Men can develop scarring of the urethra, making urination difficult and occasionally causing infertility. Although rare, both sexes are at risk of a type of arthritis known as Reiter's Syndrome – an inflammation and swelling caused by the spread of the infection through the bloodstream into the joints.

If a pregnant woman has chlamydia, her baby may be born prematurely, have eye infections or develop pneumonia.

Minimizing Your Risk

Following these suggestions may help you to protect yourself from contracting chlamydia:

- Learn about safer sex methods.
- Make informed decisions. Talk to your partner(s) about their STI status and the use of protection.
- Correct use of condoms reduces the risk of acquiring chlamydia and other STIs.
- Get tested for chlamydia if you are sexually active.
- If you are diagnosed and treated for chlamydia, be sure to follow your health care provider's treatment and follow-up recommendations. If infected, you should abstain from sex until both you and your sexual partner(s) have completed your antibiotic

treatment. You can easily be reinfected if your partner is not treated as well.

- It is important that you or someone from your public health department notify any of your sexual partners who may have been put at risk of infection. They will also need to be tested and possibly treated.

Health Canada's Role

Health Canada's Sexual Health and Sexually Transmitted Infections Section provides national leadership and coordination through programs that develop and support surveillance and targeted research studies. Working with provincial and territorial governments, non-governmental organizations and health care providers, the Section develops evidence-based national standards and policies, promotes the exchange of information and engages in prevention and promotion activities.

Need More Info?

For more information on chlamydia, talk with your doctor or visit your local public health clinic. You can also find helpful information on chlamydia, other STIs, and sexual health at the following websites:

What you need to know about STI: Chlamydia
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/std-mts/sti_g.html

Sexual Health and Sexually Transmitted Infections
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/std-mts/index.html>

Where to go for help
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/std-mts/sti_t.html

STI Helpline Telephone Numbers
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/std-mts/phone_e.html

For tips on safer sex practices go to Health Canada's Condoms, Sexually transmitted infections, Safer Sex and You Web site at:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/epiu-aepi/std-mts/condom_e.html

For information on STIs directed at youth go to the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada's sexuality and you Teen Web site at:
<http://www.sexualityandu.ca/eng/teens/STI/index.cfm>

For more information on common STIs and tips on prevention go to the College of Family Physicians of Canada's Web site at:
<http://www.cfpc.ca/English/cfpc/programs/patient%20education/sti/default.asp?s=1>

Additional It's Your Health articles can be found at:
www.healthcanada.ca/iyh
You can also call (613) 957-2991