

# Your guide to sexual health and wellbeing

What do you know about...

Chlamydia

Vaginal health

Genital herpes

Gonorrhoea

Genital warts



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# Remember, you can also get an infection without having sex.

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## Chlamydia: your questions answered

### Q. What is chlamydia?

**A.** Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) which affects men and women. It is caused by bacteria that can go undetected for a very long time. It is a common infection with around 1 in 10 young people under the age of 25 testing positive.

Most people with chlamydia do not experience any obvious symptoms and so do not know they have it.

### Q. What are the symptoms of chlamydia?

**A.** Most people with chlamydia will not have any symptoms. If symptoms are present, these usually include discharge from the penis or vagina, and pain or a burning sensation when peeing. Women may also experience pain during sex, or bleeding in between periods or after sex. Men may notice some discomfort and swelling of the testicles.

Symptoms of chlamydia can occur at any time in a regular sexual relationship, but they are more likely to show up between 1 and 6 weeks after having unprotected sex with someone who has chlamydia. Sometimes the infection is discovered when one partner develops symptoms, but more often it is diagnosed when someone goes for a check-up.

As more than half of people with chlamydia do not experience any symptoms it is important to get tested regularly. You can be at risk even if you have had unprotected sex only once.

## **Q. How can I catch chlamydia?**

**A.** You can catch chlamydia by having unprotected sex and by sharing sex toys. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during childbirth and when this happens, the baby may develop eye or chest infections.

Any sexually active person can catch chlamydia although it is most common in women between the ages of 15 and 19, and men under the age of 25. You or your partner could have picked up the infection from a previous partner without even knowing it. The more sexual partners you have, the more chance you have of being infected.

## **Q. What tests are there for chlamydia?**

**A.** Men and women under the age of 25 who are sexually active (and especially those under 20), should test for chlamydia when they change partner to make sure they are not infected.

If you or your partner are worried that you may have chlamydia, see a doctor straight-away. You can visit your local GP surgery, or sexual health service (for example, GUM or family planning). These are specialist services that deal with sexually

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transmitted infections, are completely confidential, and you can go to without having to see your GP first. Local pharmacists can also provide advice and testing facilities.

Getting tested is simple and straightforward. If you do not have any symptoms, you will usually be asked to provide a urine sample. If you have symptoms, the nurse, doctor or health adviser may examine you and use a swab to take a sample of cells from the vagina or penis. A swab looks a bit like a cotton bud, and collecting a sample only takes a few minutes and is not painful, although it may be a little uncomfortable for a moment.

Women who do not have any symptoms have a choice of either providing a urine sample or using a swab themselves to take a sample of cells from the entrance to the vagina.

**If you would prefer to have a urine test than a swab test – let the doctor or nurse know.**

Some sexual health services and pharmacies provide free chlamydia testing kits that you can do at home yourself – this involves providing a urine or swab sample which you can post or take back to the clinic for testing. If you test positive, you will get good advice from your doctor, health adviser or pharmacist.

## Q. If I have chlamydia, what happens next?

**A.** Test results are usually available within 7 to 14 days. A chlamydia infection is easily treated with a course of antibiotics and both you and your partner(s) will need treatment.

Sometimes you will be treated straightaway without waiting for the result of a test, for example, if your partner is known to have an infection. The following important points should be noted:

- You will probably be given an antibiotic to take in a single dose, all at once.
- Antibiotics can interfere with the oral contraceptive pill.
- Your current and previous partner(s) will be asked to attend for a check-up and to receive treatment.
- **Do not have sex even with condoms** until 1 week after both you and your partner have completed the treatment. A health adviser or nurse will speak to you a few weeks after treatment to check that everything is okay. This is usually done by calling you at a time that suits you.
- You should be retested again after 6 to 12 months to ensure you don't have chlamydia. This can be done at the GUM service, at a pharmacy or by your GP.

## Q. Why is early treatment important?

**A.** If untreated, an infection can lead to other more serious problems. In women, chlamydia may lead to pelvic inflammatory

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disease, fertility problems (difficulty in becoming pregnant) or ectopic pregnancy. If men are not treated, the infection may spread to the testicles and cause discomfort. These problems are rare but the risk increases every time you get chlamydia.

### **Q. How do I tell my partner that I have chlamydia?**

**A.** Some people can feel upset, angry, frightened or embarrassed about discussing sexually transmitted infections with their current or former partner(s).

If you do test positive for chlamydia, you need to tell everyone that you have had sex with in the last 3 to 6 months (or your last sexual contact if beyond this time) so that they can also be tested. Sexual health staff can help you by giving advice about who should be contacted and the best way to contact them. Your clinic can arrange, with your permission, to contact your partner(s) or give them a 'contact slip' asking them to call the clinic. This is called 'partner notification' or 'contact tracing'. The staff will explain to the person that they may have been exposed to an STI and that they should go for a check-up. They do not give your name and your details will remain totally confidential.

Nobody can force you to tell your partner(s) about having an STI, but it is strongly recommended. Left untested and untreated, an infection can lead to serious illness.

## **Q. How can I best prevent infection?**

**A.** The best way to prevent all sexually transmitted infections, including chlamydia, as well as to protect against HIV, is to practise **safer sex**. This means using a condom for vaginal, oral and anal sex.

## **Safer sex**

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can pass from one person to another through unprotected sex and sharing sex toys. You don't need to have lots of sexual partners to get an STI. However, you are more likely to have an STI if you have had a recent change in sexual partner or if you have had more than two sexual partners in the last 12 months.

Safer sex involves using condoms and dental dams for oral sex, and condoms with water-based lube for anal and vaginal sex. This helps prevent infections being passed on to your partner.

Condoms are available free from sexual health services, including GUM and family planning, and young people's drop-in services. They are also for sale at most pharmacies and supermarkets. Always use a quality condom that displays the European CE Kitemark.

**For more information, visit [www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk](http://www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk) or call the Information Line on 0800 121 4590.**