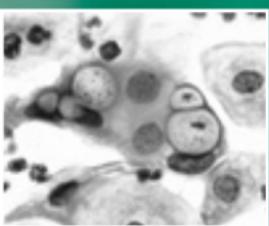


**Sexually Transmitted Diseases**



# **Chlamydial infection**

**Questions and Answers**



Generalitat de Catalunya  
**Departament  
de Salut**

## What is chlamydial infection?

It is a sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia trachomatis*, being one of the most widely spread in Europe. It is most often seen in adolescents and young adults.

In the primary stage, infection can be found in several mucous membranes of the body: usually urethra (or urine canal) in men and cervix in women, and also the rectum; far less frequently the pharynx or throat.

If genital infection is not treated on time, sometimes it can spread to the reproductive system. **In women it can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)**, leading to permanent damage with severe consequences in the long run such as chronic pelvic pain and sterility.

Infection, although it may cause complications, can go undetected, as it often produces mild or no symptoms.

**Genital chlamydial infection can increase the risk of acquiring HIV during sex.**

## How is it transmitted?

- **Easily during vaginal or anal sex** with an infected partner, often with no symptoms or discomfort; transmission through oral sex is also possible but far less likely.
- **From the infected mother to her infant during delivery.** Chlamydial infection can damage the baby's eyes and lungs.

### In addition...

It is possible to be infected with chlamydial infection more than once. In women repeated episodes increase the risk of developing pelvic inflammatory disease.

## What are the symptoms?

**In case of genital infection:**

**In around 50% of men, signs and symptoms of the infection are:** abnormal discharge from the penis and/or burning or pain with urination; in some cases, pain in one of the testicles.

**Women have rarely apparent signals of the infection:** unusual vaginal discharge, pain on urinating, pain in the abdomen, unusual vaginal bleeding or painful sexual intercourse.

**In case of rectal or pharyngeal infection,** there are usually no symptoms.

These occurrences can be similar to other infections. A doctor should be consulted, who will make the diagnosis.

## How can I find out if I have chlamydial infection?

**Specific tests are needed. Usually a sample is collected from the infected area (urethra in men, cervix or vagina in women, rectum or throat),** which is simply obtained by health professionals by rubbing the mucosal surface.

**Some tests for chlamydia can be performed on urine samples.**

## Can chlamydial infection be cured?

**Infection can be cured. Treatment is comfortable and effective, and is based on orally-administered antibiotics.**

**In addition...**

**When infected persons get to know they're infected, they should inform their sexual partners during last months, so that they can receive treatment and prevent complications. In addition, the chain of new infections will be broken.**

## How can chlamydial infection be prevented?

Unless both partners know they're not infected, to reduce the risk of acquiring chlamydial infection and other STIs:

- **Use a masculine or feminine condom during vaginal, anal or oral sex.**
- **Avoid having sex under the influence of alcohol or drugs**, as the perception of risk decreases, and could lead to unprotected sex or incorrect condom use.
- **Limiting the number of sexual partners;** this is also a preventive measure.

### In addition...

#### To reduce complications:

- **Consult your health professional in case of warning signs of sexually transmitted infections** (lesions on the skin or mucous membranes, particularly in the genital area, unusual genital discharge and/or burning sensation when urinating), who will determine their importance, and avoid having sexual intercourse until then.
- **You should be tested for sexually transmitted infections** if you suspect you may have been at risk of being infected. **Detection of chlamydial infection might be especially recommended** in these cases:
  - **Sexually active men and women aged 25 years or less** are more likely to be infected.
  - **Women with new or several sexual partners in the last year.**
  - **Individuals having recently received treatment for the infection.** After some months, you should ensure no re-infection occurs.
  - **Pregnant women.** Adequate treatment of the infection in pregnant women could prevent the baby from being infected.

Your healthcare professional will give you specific advice.

# Signs and symptoms of chlamydial infection without treatment

## Initial infection

Infection starts and is limited to certain mucous membranes of the body. Inflammation and symptoms may develop within 7-21 days after from the infecting sexual contact.

Gender	Infected area	Possible symptoms
	Urethra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mild, white or clear discharge from penis</li> <li>Burning sensation when urinating</li> <li><b>No symptoms in 50% of infections</b></li> </ul>
	Rectum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discomfort in the rectum and anus and anal discharge</li> <li><b>No symptoms in most cases</b></li> </ul>
	Cervix Urethra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slightly increased vaginal discharge</li> <li>Burning sensation when urinating</li> <li><b>No symptoms in 70-80% of cases</b></li> </ul>

Infections may cure spontaneously over time, even though some may persist for many months or even years.

## Complications of the infection in the reproductive system

Gender	Infected area	Possible symptoms
	Epididymis*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pain or swelling of the testicle</li> </ul>
	*Unusual condition.	
	Uterus* Fallopian tubes* Surrounding tissues*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower abdominal pain</li> <li>Vaginal bleeding between menstrual cycles</li> <li>Menstrual disorders</li> <li>Painful sexual intercourse</li> <li>Fever</li> </ul>
	<p>* The infectious and inflammatory process of the reproductive system is called <b>pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)</b>. Within the first year of infection, around 10% of women are diagnosed with PID. PID may cause irreversible damage and, in the long term, the blockage of the fallopian tubes (affecting 10-15% of women with PID).</p> <p>Infection may also progress silently (without symptoms) causing these complications.</p> <p>Sequelae: chronic lower abdominal pain, ectopic pregnancy, and sterility.</p>	

## Extragenital complications of the infection

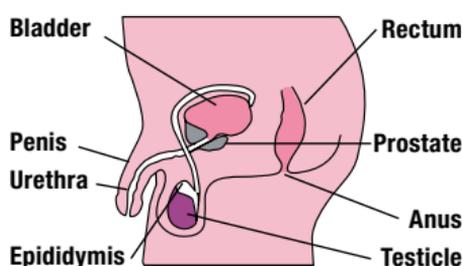
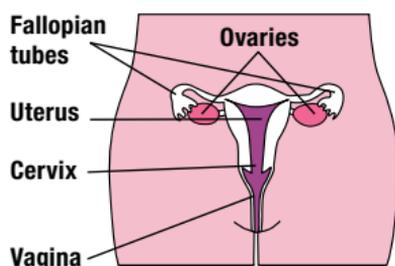
They affect 1% of men with genital infection and rarely women.

- Joint inflammation and pain, which may be accompanied by inflammation of the urethra, eyes, and skin lesions (Reiter's syndrome).

## Complications from pregnant women to baby

- Newborn conjunctivitis and infant pneumonia.

N.B.: Most relevant and frequent data on chlamydial infection are summarized on the table.



# Sexually Transmitted Diseases

## Don't forget that:

- An individual can be infected and not know about it.
- The use of condoms effectively reduces the risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted infection.
- Early diagnosis and treatment prevent most of the complications of sexually transmitted diseases.

If you have any doubts or if you think that your behaviour puts you at risk of infection, visit one of the public health system's health centres, sexual and reproductive health units or sexually transmitted disease units.

You can also call:



Sanitat Respon 24 hores  
**902 111 444**

**SIDA**  
**900 212222**  
Informació confidencial i gratuïta

<http://canalsalut.gencat.cat>