

## CHLAMYDIA FACT SHEET

### WHAT IS CHLAMYDIA?

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacteria, *Chlamydia trachomatis*, which can damage a man or woman's reproductive organs. Even though symptoms of Chlamydia are usually mild or absent, serious complications that cause permanent damage, including sterility, can occur "silently" before a man or woman ever recognizes a problem.

### HOW COMMON IS CHLAMYDIA?

Chlamydia is the most commonly reported bacterial sexually transmitted disease in the United States. Under reporting is significant, because most people with Chlamydia are not aware they are infected and do not seek testing. Also, testing is not often done if individuals are treated for their symptoms. An estimated 2.8 million Americans are infected with Chlamydia each year. Women are often re-infected when their sex partners are not treated.

### HOW DO PEOPLE GET CHLAMYDIA?

Chlamydia can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during vaginal childbirth.

Any sexually active person can be infected with Chlamydia. The greater the number of sex partners, the greater the risk of infection. The cervix (opening to the uterus) of teenage girls and young women is not fully matured; this puts them at a higher risk for infection if sexually active. Since Chlamydia can be transmitted by oral or anal sex, men who have sex with men are also at risk for Chlamydial infection.

### WHAT ARE THE SYPTOMS OF CHLAMYDIA?

Chlamydia is known as a "silent" disease because about three quarters of infected women and about half of infected men have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur they usually appear with 1 to 3 weeks after exposure.

Women with symptoms may notice: discharge from the vagina, bleeding between periods or after sex, pain in the abdomen, sometimes with fever and nausea, burning or pain when urinating (peeing), and urinating (peeing) more often.

Males with symptoms may notice: burning or pain when urinating (peeing), and a watery, white drip from the penis.

### WHAT ABOUT COMPLICATIONS OF UNTREATED CHLAMIDIA INFECTION?

Chlamydia infections can progress to serious reproductive and other health problems with both short term and long term consequences. Like the infection itself, the damage that it can cause is often "silent".

For women, the untreated infection can spread into the uterus or fallopian tubes and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). This happens in up to 40 percent of women with untreated Chlamydia. PID can cause permanent damage to the fallopian tubes, uterus (womb), and surrounding tissues. The damage can lead to chronic pelvic pain, infertility, and potentially ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the womb). Women infected with Chlamydia are up to 5 times more likely to become infected with HIV, if exposed. If a woman is pregnant, there is

some evidence that untreated Chlamydial infections can lead to premature delivery. Babies who are born to infected mothers can get Chlamydial infections in their eyes and respiratory tracts. Chlamydia is a leading cause of early infant pneumonia and conjunctivitis (pink eye) in newborns.

For men, complications are rare. Infection sometimes spreads to the epididymis (the tube that carries sperm from the testes), causing pain, fever, and rarely, sterility.

Rarely, for both women and men genital Chlamydial infection can cause arthritis that can be accompanied by skin lesions and inflammation of the eye and urethra (Reiter's syndrome).

#### HOW IS CHLAMYDIA DIAGNOSED?

There are tests available to diagnose Chlamydia. Some tests can be performed on urine; other tests require that a specimen be collected from a woman's cervix or a man's penis.

#### HOW IS CHLAMYDIA TREATED?

Chlamydia can be easily treated and cured with antibiotics. A single dose of azithromycin or a week of Doxycycline (twice daily) is the most commonly used treatments. HIV positive persons with Chlamydia should receive the same treatment as those who are HIV negative.

All sex partners should be evaluated, tested, and treated. **Persons with Chlamydia should abstain from sexual intercourse until they and their sex partners have completed treatment, otherwise re-infection is possible.**

Women whose sex partners have not been appropriately treated are at high risk for re-infection. Having multiple infections increases a woman's risk of serious reproductive health complications, including infertility. **Retesting should be considered for women, especially adolescents, three to four months after treatment.** This is especially true if a woman does not know if her sex partner received treatment.

#### HOW CAN CHLAMYDIA BE PREVENTED?

The best way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual contact, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected.

Latex male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of Chlamydia.

Routine screening is recommended annually for all sexually active women 25 years of age and younger. An annual screening test also is recommended for older women with risk factors for Chlamydia (a new sex partner or multiple sex partners). All pregnant women should have a screening test for Chlamydia.

**IF A PERSON HAS BEEN TREATED FOR CHLAMYDIA (OR ANY OTHER STD), HE OR SHE SHOULD NOTIFY ALL RECENT SEX PARTNERS SO THEY CAN SEE A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER AND BE TREATED.**