

What do you know about...

**Chlamydia**

Vaginal health

Genital herpes

Gonorrhoea

Genital warts

**Your guide to  
sexual health  
and wellbeing**

This resource may also be made available on request in the following formats:



 **0131 314 5300**

 **[nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net)**

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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.

More than half of people with chlamydia have no symptoms, so if you have had sex with someone who has chlamydia, you should consider having a test. 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. 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.** If you or your partner are worried that you may have chlamydia, or any other STI, arrange to be tested. You can visit your local GP surgery, or sexual health service (for example, genito-urinary medicine (GUM) or family planning). These are specialist services that deal with STIs, are completely confidential, and you can go to without having to see your GP first.

## Your guide to sexual health and wellbeing

Getting tested is simple. If you have symptoms, the nurse, doctor or clinician may examine you and use a swab to take a sample 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. Men who do not have any symptoms will usually be asked to provide a urine sample.

Women who do not have any symptoms will usually take a swab themselves from the entrance to the vagina. A urine sample might be offered, although the results from this are not as accurate as a swab.

## 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 regular partner(s) will need treatment.

Sometimes you will be treated straight away 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 a short course of an antibiotic.
- Your current and previous partner(s) will be advised to attend for treatment and/or a test for chlamydia.
- **Do not have sex, even with condoms,** until 1 week after both you and your partner have completed the treatment. A nurse, doctor or clinician 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.

## 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 disease. Rarely, fertility problems (difficulty in becoming pregnant) or ectopic pregnancy can result from having chlamydia, but most people who have chlamydia **do not** go on to have any further problems.

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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 STIs with their current or former partner(s).

If you test positive for chlamydia, you will be advised 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 by giving advice about who should be contacted and the best way to contact them. Your clinic can arrange, if you agree, to contact your partner(s) anonymously or give them a contact number and ask 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 untreated, an infection can lead to serious illness.

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

**A.** The best way to prevent all STIs, 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

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

Condoms are available free from sexual health services, including GUM 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 NHS inform free on 0800 22 44 88.**

**The helpline is open Monday to Friday, 8 am to 10 pm, and Saturday to Sunday, 9 am to 5 pm. It also provides an interpreting service.**