

# What is Chlamydia?



TULANE  
Campus Health

The Health Center  
for Student Care

Chlamydia is a common STI that can cause infections in the genital area, rectum, and throat. It can cause permanent damage to the reproductive system, potentially making it difficult or impossible to get pregnant later. Chlamydia can also lead to a potentially fatal ectopic pregnancy (when a pregnancy occurs outside the womb).

## Signs & Symptoms

### How do I know if I have chlamydia?

Chlamydia often does not cause noticeable symptoms but can still lead to serious health problems. Symptoms, if they do occur, may not appear until weeks after sexual contact with an infected partner. Chlamydia can be passed through vaginal, anal and oral sex. Symptoms may differ, depending on the body parts that are penetrated.

#### Symptoms may include:

- Bleeding between menstrual cycles
- Abnormal genital discharge (vaginal and penile)
- A burning sensation when urinating.
- Pain during sex (rectal, vaginal)
- Painful, swollen testicles (less common)
- Rectal pain
- Discharge from the rectum
- Bleeding from the rectum
- Sore throat

## Risk Factors

### Am I at risk for chlamydia?

Anyone who is sexually active can get chlamydia through vaginal, anal, or oral sex without a condom with a partner who has the infection.

If you are sexually active, have an open discussion with your healthcare provider about whether you should be tested for chlamydia or other STIs.

## How Chlamydia Spreads

Chlamydia is spread through vaginal, anal, or oral sex without a condom with someone who has the infection. A pregnant person with chlamydia can pass the infection to their baby during childbirth.

## Prevention

### How can I reduce my risk of getting chlamydia?

- Engaging in sexual activity with one or a small number of partners who have been tested and with whom you communicate openly about sexual health
- Using condoms correctly every time you have sex.

## If I am pregnant, how can I protect my baby from getting chlamydia?

If you are pregnant and have chlamydia, you can pass it to your baby during delivery. This can cause serious health problems for your baby. If you are pregnant, talk to your healthcare provider about testing and treatment as soon as possible to reduce risks.

## Testing and Diagnosis

### Should I be tested for chlamydia?

If you are sexually active, talk to your healthcare provider about whether you should be tested for chlamydia. You should be tested every year if:

- You are sexually active and under 25 years old.
- You are 25 or older and have risk factors, such as having multiple sex partners or a partner with an STI.

Testing is also recommended during pregnancy in some cases.

### How will my healthcare provider know if I have chlamydia?

A healthcare provider will diagnose chlamydia using laboratory tests. This may involve providing a urine sample, or using a swab to collect a sample from the genital area or throat.

## Treatment and Recovery

### Is there a cure for chlamydia?

Yes, with the correct treatment, chlamydia can be cured. It is important to complete the full course of medication provided by your healthcare provider. Chlamydia treatment stops the infection but cannot undo any permanent damage caused by the disease.

**Repeat infections are common**, so it is important to be retested approximately three months after treatment, even if your partner has been treated.

### When Can I Have Sex Again?

Do not have sex until you and your partner(s) have completed treatment and your symptoms are gone. If you were given a single dose of medication, wait seven days after taking it before having sex. If you were prescribed medication for seven days, wait at least seven days after finishing your treatment before having sex. Both you and your partner(s) should complete treatment before resuming sexual activity to avoid reinfection.

## What Happens If I Don't Get Treated?

If left untreated, chlamydia can cause serious health problems. Some of the complications include:

- **Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)** – This condition can cause permanent damage to the reproductive system, leading to difficulty or inability to conceive.
- **Ectopic Pregnancy** - A potentially life-threatening pregnancy that occurs outside the womb.
- **Infertility** - Not being able to get pregnant.
- **Chronic Pelvic Pain** - Ongoing pain in the pelvic or abdominal area.

In rare cases, chlamydia can cause issues like fever and pain in the testicles. It can also increase the chances of acquiring or transmitting HIV.

**Have any questions?** Reach out to your provider in one of two ways:

- Call **504-865-5255** and ask to leave a message for your provider OR
- Send a secure message through the **Patient Portal** ([campushealth.tulane.edu/patient-portal](https://campushealth.tulane.edu/patient-portal)).