

Chlamydia urethritis

What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a type of bacteria and one of its varieties, *Chlamydia trachomatis*, is the most common sexually transmissible infection (STI) in the world. It is considerably more common than gonorrhoea.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms usually appear about 2 weeks after intercourse, although the incubation period can be as long as 3 weeks and as short as 5 to 10 days.

In men

The main symptoms (if present) are:

- a burning sensation when passing urine
- a discharge (clear, white or yellow) from the penis.

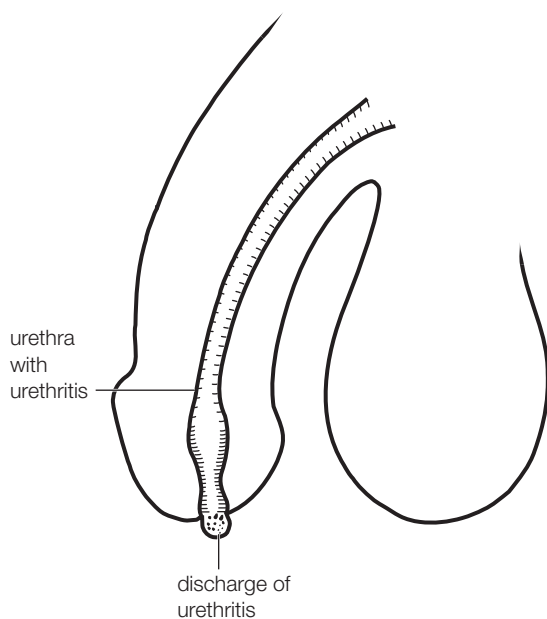
Sometimes there is no discharge, just pain. Most often the symptoms are trivial. About 40% of men with chlamydia may have no symptoms.

The first noticeable symptom is a slight tingling or burning at the tip of the penis, usually first thing in the morning. The pain sometimes becomes quite severe. The discharge soon follows. It is usually clear at first, but if untreated can become heavier and yellowish. The infection can spread to the prostate gland and testicles.

In some, the only symptoms are spots on the underpants or dampness under the foreskin.

In women

In women, chlamydia urethritis usually causes no symptoms at all (this applies to about 70%) but may cause vaginal discharge. Some may notice burning on urination.



Chlamydia urethritis in males

If untreated, as is often the case, it can infect the Fallopian tubes. This is the most common form of pelvic inflammatory disease, which can result in infertility it is known as a 'silent' epidemic.

How is it diagnosed?

Chlamydia is diagnosed by taking special swabs from the affected areas: from the urethra of the male penis and the cervix and urethra in females.

A new and easier method for the patient is to perform special PCR tests on the first voided specimen of urine.

How is chlamydia caught and spread?

It is transmitted from one person to another during sexual intercourse. Men can pick it up through vaginal sex (often the woman carries the infection without knowing) or, less commonly, through anal or oral sex with either sex.

How is chlamydia urethritis treated?

Chlamydia urethritis is treated with a course of antibiotics, usually azithromycin as a single dose or tetracycline or doxycycline for 7 days. It usually responds very well to treatment, but can be slow to respond in some people and may recur in some others. About 1 in 5 patients will need more than 1 course.

It is the male who usually notices symptoms and comes for treatment. However, it is important that the sexual partner or partners are tested even if they have no symptoms. Sexual intercourse must be avoided until the infection is cleared up in both partners.

How is chlamydia prevented?

Using condoms for vaginal or anal sex provides some protection and should be used with any new partner.

Important points

- Chlamydia is a common STI.
- It sometimes causes symptoms in men.
- There may be no symptoms in women.
- It can cause infertility in women (and less commonly in men).
- It is readily treated by antibiotics.
- Treatment may be by a single dose only but repeat courses may be needed.
- All sexual partners need to be treated.
- Do not have sex until the infection is cleared (both partners).
- It is the affected person's responsibility to inform their partner(s) that they have chlamydia.
- Condoms provide some protection.