



# Chlamydia testing and treatment

## **How can Chlamydia infection be diagnosed?**

Over the years scientists have developed more sophisticated ways of testing for Chlamydia (and other infections). In the past the best way to know whether someone had a Chlamydia infection was to actually get a sample of the secretions from the cervix or urethra where the bacteria were living and then try to grow the bacteria in a laboratory using special equipment. This involved having to use swabs to collect secretions from the cervix or urethra, which meant that the woman or man had to have a doctor or nurse inserting the swab into those parts of the body. The more secretion on the swab, the more likely that lots of Chlamydia bacteria would be found. These bacteria had to stay alive long enough to reach the laboratory so they could be grown in the equipment. So, collecting the swab carefully and transporting it to a laboratory quickly was very important. This test can still be used. It is a very accurate test and is called a “Chlamydia culture”.

More recently tests have been developed that can detect the presence of the genetic material of the Chlamydia bacteria. (Just like us, bacteria also have genes in the core, or nucleus, of their cells). The test only requires the tiniest amount of genetic material to be present in order for it to show up positive. It's no longer necessary for careful swabs capturing lots of secretions to be taken. Enough genetic material can be found in the tiniest amount of secretion to show up in the test and this will fall into a urine jar when a person urinates. This test is also a very accurate test and is obviously more appealing to most people because it does not involve having swabs inserted into the genital area. This is called a “Chlamydia PCR (polymerase chain reaction)” test.

There are other, slightly less accurate tests that can still be used, especially if the more sophisticated (and more expensive) tests aren't available in some laboratories. These also involve taking swabs from the cervix or the urethra but instead of growing the bacteria, they rely on other techniques to detect the presence of the bacteria. They are slightly less accurate because instead of proving the existence of the bacteria by growing them or by showing their genetic material, they tell us indirectly that the bacteria are present.

A blood test will not accurately tell you if you have a Chlamydia infection of the reproductive system.

## **How can it be treated?**

Fortunately, treating Chlamydia is also very simple. Chlamydia infection, unlike some other STIs, is curable. One dose of a specific antibiotic will usually kill the Chlamydia bacteria and get rid of the infection. Treating Chlamydia infection of the cervix or urethra will prevent it from travelling further up into the reproductive system and causing more serious consequences.