

# Chlamydia Infection and Symptoms

## **How does someone get a Chlamydia infection?**

Chlamydia infection in the reproductive system is passed on, or transmitted, by sexual contact. The Chlamydia bacteria survive in semen and vaginal secretions so this is how they 'travel' from one person to another.

Sexual intercourse, meaning penis-vagina intercourse is a very common way that the infection is transmitted. Chlamydia can also be transmitted by anal intercourse (penis-anus and rectum, or back passage) and can cause an infection in the person's back passage. Chlamydia can also cause an infection in a person's throat if they receive oral sex. This is when a penis goes into someone's mouth, or when someone's mouth contacts the vagina and genital area in a woman. Thus it is known as a sexually transmitted infection, or STI. Chlamydia infections are usually caused by sexual contact such as the examples above.

Sometimes a sexually transmitted Chlamydia infection can be passed on in other ways. For example, the Chlamydia bacteria also happen to like infecting a part of the eye called the conjunctiva. This is the lining of the inside of the eyelids. Chlamydia infection of the conjunctiva does not occur directly from sexual contact, but someone with a Chlamydia infection in their genital area could accidentally transmit some of the bacteria to their own eyelids or someone else's from touching their genitals and then their eyes. A pregnant woman with a Chlamydia infection in her cervix can pass this to her baby during childbirth. A baby who gets Chlamydia this way might develop conjunctivitis or pneumonia, but it won't get Chlamydia in its reproductive system or genital area.

## **What are the symptoms of Chlamydia infection?**

In about 75% of women and up to 50% of men who have Chlamydia infection, there are no symptoms. In other words, it is often an "asymptomatic" infection. This means that the Chlamydia bacteria are happily multiplying away in their chosen reproductive organs but don't give away any clues to their unsuspecting 'host' (that's us women and men) that they're there.

If a person does develop symptoms, this usually happens about 1 – 3 weeks after they get infected (ie 1 – 3 weeks after the sexual contact where the bacteria were transmitted).

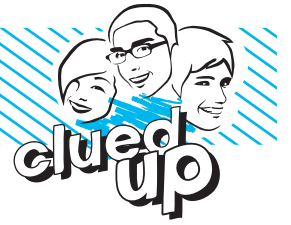
In the 25% of women and 50% of men who DO get symptoms, they are usually:

### **For women:**

- A vaginal discharge. Chlamydia actually infects the cervix making it inflamed, or swollen, red and producing of a white or yellow discharge. Because the cervix hardly has any pain nerve endings, women don't feel pain the way they would if it were an infected toe or finger, for example. But they will notice a discharge coming from their vagina. This discharge will usually be white or yellow and will not be particularly smelly
- Pain and itching in the vagina
- Unusual bleeding from the vagina
- A woman might also feel pain on urination
- Pain during sex or pain in the pelvic or lower abdominal area. This is usually a sign that the Chlamydia infection has travelled up into the uterus or Fallopian tubes. It might also be accompanied by a fever and feeling a bit 'flu-ey'
- Chronic pain in the pelvic area. This is a symptom of pelvic inflammatory disease.

### **For men:**

- A urethral discharge in men. As with women, the Chlamydia bacteria cause inflammation leading to swelling, redness and a discharge this time in the urethra. A man will notice white or yellow fluid coming from the end of his penis. He may also feel pain or discomfort on urination.
- Pain in the scrotum or pelvic area. This is usually a sign that the Chlamydia infection has travelled back from the urethra into the epididymis or the prostate gland. These organs then get inflamed as well and can become sore.



**For men or women:**

- If Chlamydia infects the rectum (back passage) the person will sometimes get a discharge or bleeding coming from their back passage and it may also be sore or itchy
- If Chlamydia infects the throat the person may have a sore throat
- Chlamydia can also infect part of the eye called the conjunctiva. This is the lining inside the top and bottom eyelids. An infected conjunctiva is called conjunctivitis. The conjunctiva become sore, swollen and make a sticky discharge. By the way, conjunctivitis is a common condition that is usually caused by another type of bacteria altogether (which has nothing to do with sexual contact).