



Consequences of Untreated Chlamydia Infection

Untreated Chlamydia infection can lead to very serious consequences for women and men. They can become infertile, meaning they can't have kids. Women are more likely to be affected. If a woman or man has a Chlamydia infection, chances are they won't know about it, because it is often asymptomatic.

Infertility in women

In women, serious problems can arise if the bacteria travel from the cervix into the uterus and Fallopian tubes making them infected and inflamed. The danger of getting an infection here is that scarring can occur in the Fallopian tubes and cause blockage. Eggs released from the ovaries can't travel down the Fallopian tubes and reach sperm so conception can't occur and a baby can't be made. Chlamydia infection in the Fallopian tubes is a common cause of infertility in women.

Ectopic pregnancy

Sometimes scarring of the Fallopian tubes doesn't completely block them, and an egg can be fertilised by a sperm. But if the tubes are infected and inflamed from a Chlamydia infection, the fertilised egg can have difficulty travelling down the tube to the uterus, and might get stuck in the wall of the tube itself. This can lead to an ectopic pregnancy, which is when a fertilised egg tries to grow into an embryo outside the uterus. An ectopic pregnancy is very dangerous and a woman can die from this.

Pelvic inflammatory disease

Sometimes the Chlamydia bacteria go even further than the Fallopian tubes, and into the ovaries and the abdominal cavity itself. When Chlamydia bacteria infect the reproductive system beyond the cervix – and this might include the uterus, Fallopian tubes, ovaries or abdominal cavity – it's known as pelvic inflammatory disease or PID for short. Apart from the scarring and the risk of infertility and ectopic pregnancy, a woman can also become very sick just from having an infection in the upper part of her reproductive system. It's estimated that about 30% of women with a Chlamydia infection of their cervix will develop PID. Chlamydia is also an infection that can keep happening – in other words, the body doesn't become immune to it the way it can with something else, like chicken pox. Women who get repeated infections with Chlamydia are at even greater risk of PID and other complications.

Infertility in men

If Chlamydia bacteria travel up into the reproductive system of a man, they can infect the epididymis and the testicles. Inflammation here can also cause fertility problems for a man, because they can't produce sperm as efficiently. A small percentage of men with Chlamydia infection in their urethra will develop infection in their epididymis or testicles.

Arthritis

A rare complication of Chlamydia infection is swollen, painful joints, or arthritis. This is more common in men than women who get Chlamydia. It's not known exactly why this occurs but is thought to be genetically related and due to an unusual immune response by the body to the infection. This condition is called "Reiter's Syndrome" after a doctor who discovered it. Symptoms include painful joints, tiredness and weight loss. Most people who develop Reiter's syndrome recover after a few weeks or months, but some get painful joints on and off over many years.