

C'mon, tell me about chlamydia ^[1]

(1) Dear Alice,

What exactly is chlamydia? How is it transmitted? Can you get it through oral sex (man on woman)? How is it treated (especially in the case of males)?

Help!

— Need to know asap!!!

(2) Dear Alice,

Could you tell me about the symptoms of chlamydia and if one test is enough to detect that disease? Thank you.

— Curious

Answer

Dear Need to know asap!!! and Curious,

Sounds like it's time to talk about the who, what, where, when, and why of this STI (sexually transmitted infection). Chlamydia is a common STI caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia trachomatis*. It usually infects the genitals, but can also cause infection in other areas, such as the rectum and throat. Transmission of the bacteria occurs when mucous membranes come in contact with the infected fluids (e.g., vaginal fluids, semen, and pre-ejaculate) of someone carrying the infection. Curious, there is a test that can detect chlamydia. And, if test results come back positive, don't fret — the infection is easily treated and cured. Read on to learn a bit more about what symptoms to look out for, testing, treatment, and preventing a chlamydial infection.

Commonly occurring with [gonorrhea](#) ^[2], chlamydia is less likely to spread through oral sex than vaginal or anal intercourse because the bacterium that causes chlamydia prefers to target the genitals rather than the throat. On that note, Need to know asap!!!, while it's possible to spread the infection from mouth-to-penis AND penis-to-mouth, it's unlikely. The infection is even less likely to be transmitted from the vagina or anus to the mouth or vice versa.

Curious, a chlamydial infection is typically asymptomatic (i.e., associated symptoms are absent), but possible symptoms include:

- Vaginal or penile discharge
- Lower abdominal pain
- Painful urination
- Testicular pain in men
- Bleeding between periods and after sex in women
- Painful sexual intercourse in women

List adapted from the [Mayo Clinic](#) [3].

To know where you stand with this bacteria, getting an annual check-up with a health care provider where you can request to be tested for STIs, is recommended. This is especially crucial since those infected with chlamydia may not even know it. You can also visit a sexual health clinic or student health center to request testing.

When and if you're tested for chlamydia, gathering a specimen for the nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT) — the recommended test for a chlamydial infection — is painless and simple. A health care provider may either collect a swab from the infected area (i.e., vagina or cervix in women, or urethra in men) OR ask for a urine sample. If an infection is suspected in the throat or rectum, swab samples may be taken at those sites. The collected swab(s) or sample(s) are then sent to a lab to be analyzed using NAAT. It's worth noting that the NAAT is not cleared for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) with rectal or throat specimens [4], but has shown promise in detecting the bacteria among men in particular.

Chlamydia treatment is the same for both men and women — it's easily treated and cured with prescription antibiotics. If left untreated, chlamydia can develop into further complications, which can include pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) [5] in women and urethritis or epididymitis [6] in men. To reduce the risk of getting chlamydia (and, in turn, any potential complications), the use of condoms and dams (for oral sex) is recommended.

For even more information on chlamydia and other STIs, check out the *Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health* [7] archives. Knowledge is power — and pleasure!

Alice!

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[3] <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/chlamydia/basics/symptoms/con-20020807>

[4] <http://www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/chlamydia.htm>

[5] <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pelvic-inflammatory-disease/basics/definition/CON-20022341>

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