

WHAT'S NEW

From the Third U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

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Screening for Chlamydial Infection

What Is Chlamydial Infection?

Chlamydia trachomatis is a sexually transmitted infection that affects men and women. It is the most common bacterial sexually transmitted disease (STD) in the United States. An estimated 3 million new cases of chlamydial infection occur each year. Most people who have chlamydia usually do not know it because they have no symptoms. Chlamydia can be treated and cured easily and

Most people who are infected with chlamydia have no symptoms.

inexpensively. If it is not detected, chlamydia can lead to infertility and other serious health problems in men and women, including increased risk for HIV infection. Among pregnant women, chlamydia can cause tubal pregnancies, which can be fatal to the pregnant woman. Babies born to

women with chlamydia can develop eye infections and pneumonia.

Who Can Get Chlamydia?

Men and women can get and transmit chlamydial infection through sexual intercourse. Reported rates of chlamydia are higher among women than among men because men are not tested as regularly and don't seek health care as often as women do. Sexually active women aged 25 and younger are at greatest risk for complications as a result of undetected and untreated chlamydial infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 15- to 19-year-old girls account for almost half of all reported cases among women, and women aged 20-24 account for an additional 33 percent. The CDC reports that 1 in 10 teenage girls tested for chlamydia is infected, but rates vary in different communities. Risk factors for chlamydial infection include:

- Having multiple sex partners.
- Having had an STD in the past.
- Not using condoms consistently and correctly.

The greatest risk to women is not knowing they have chlamydia.

Who Should Be Screened for Chlamydia?

The third USPSTF recommends that primary care clinicians routinely screen all women, whether or not they are pregnant, if they:

- Are sexually active and aged 25 or younger.
- Have more than one sexual partner, regardless of age.
- Have had an STD in the past, regardless of age.
- Do not use condoms consistently and correctly, regardless of age.

What's New from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is a series of fact sheets based on work of the third U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). The USPSTF systematically reviews the evidence of effectiveness of a wide range of clinical preventive services—including screening, counseling, and chemoprevention (the use of medication to prevent diseases)—to develop recommendations for preventive care in the primary care setting. **This fact sheet presents highlights of USPSTF recommendations on this topic and should not be used to make treatment or policy decisions.**

More detailed information on this subject is available in the Systematic Evidence Review, Summary of the Evidence, and USPSTF Recommendations and Rationale on the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Web site (<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm>), through the National Guideline Clearinghouse (<http://www.guideline.gov>), in print through the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse (1-800-358-9295), and in the April 2001 Supplement to the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

www.ahrq.gov

Routine screening of women who fall into any of these categories may reduce their risk of infertility and, if they are pregnant, may improve the health of their newborn babies. According to the CDC, States with chlamydia screening programs have reported that chlamydial infection rates in women have been reduced by as much as 67 percent.

The third USPSTF makes no recommendation for or against screening women older than 26 who are not otherwise at risk. They conclude the benefits of routine screening were likely to be small, but screening may be appropriate for some women. The third USPSTF concludes that there is not enough evidence to recommend screening men who have no symptoms.

The second USPSTF made similar recommendations regarding screening for chlamydial infection in 1996. Based on new evidence published since then, the third USPSTF has reinforced those recommendations.

Does Screening for Chlamydia Save Money?

According to studies reviewed by the third USPSTF:

- The cost of screening women who are not pregnant and who are at risk for chlamydial infection may be less than the cost of treating chlamydia and its complications.

- Screening patients at greatest risk is more cost effective than screening all patients.
- DNA or RNA amplification tests are more sensitive than culture.

Information on the costs and cost savings of different screening and treatment methods is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/HEDIS.htm>.

The Take-Home Message

The third USPSTF recommends that clinicians routinely screen all sexually active women aged 25 and younger and all women who may otherwise be at risk—whether or not they are pregnant—for chlamydial infection. Early detection is the most effective way to prevent the serious health problems in women and newborn babies that this often “silent disease” can cause. New urine testing methods may make screening men for chlamydial infection feasible. These urine testing methods may be particularly useful for screening both men and women in nontraditional settings.

For more information on chlamydia screening and treatment, contact the following organizations:

American Academy of Family Physicians

11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway
Leawood, KS 66211-2672
Phone: 913-906-6000
<http://www.aafp.org>

The USPSTF recommends that all primary care clinicians routinely screen sexually active women younger than age 25 for chlamydia.

American Academy of Pediatrics

141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
Phone: 847-434-4000
Fax: 847-434-8000
<http://www.aap.org>

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

ACOG Resource Center
409 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20090-6920
Phone: 202-863-2518
Fax: 202-484-1595
<http://www.acog.org>

American Social Health Association

P.O. Box 13827
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
Phone: 919-361-8400
Fax: 919-361-8425
<http://www.ashastd.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Division of STD Prevention
1600 Clifton Road NE
MS-E-02
Atlanta, GA 30333
Phone: 404-639-8357
Fax: 404-639-8609
<http://www.cdc.gov>

Healthfinder

<http://www.healthfinder.gov>



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U.S. Preventive Services
Task Force

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