Chlamydia Screening: A Routine Test

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacterium Chlamydia trachomatis. Any sexually active person can become infected with chlamydia by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her infant during vaginal childbirth. The highest rates of chlamydia are in persons aged 15 to 24 years; an estimated 6% to 10% of these adolescents and young women test positive for chlamydia.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CHLAMYDIA?
It is common for people who are infected with chlamydia to have no symptoms, or very mild symptoms that may be easy to ignore. Young women may have a burning sensation during urination, abnormal vaginal discharge, or bleeding between menstrual periods. Men may have a burning sensation during urination or discharge from the penis.

CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING CHLAMYDIA
Chlamydia can damage young women’s reproductive organs and lead to problems such as infertility.

WHO SHOULD BE TESTED FOR CHLAMYDIA?
Because chlamydia infections are common and have particular consequences for young women, and because most young women and girls have no symptoms during a chlamydia infection, it is essential for sexually active young women to be tested regularly. A study in this month’s Archives showed that routine chlamydia screening in a pediatric urgent care clinic was a new and feasible way to provide chlamydia screening to female adolescents. Yearly testing is recommended for all women younger than 25 years who have been sexually active and for anyone who is pregnant.

WHAT ARE BARRIERS TO GETTING TESTED?
• Some people may be scared that the test will be painful or embarrassing. Today, screening can be done using a urine sample or vaginal swab. Check with your provider to see if these tests are available at your clinic.
• Some people do not get tested because they do not believe their partner “looks like a person who has chlamydia.” However, anyone who has ever been sexually active could have chlamydia, so everyone should be tested.
• Some people do not get tested because they do not have any symptoms. Most young women who have a chlamydia infection do not have symptoms, so screening tests are important for everyone.
• Some adolescents do not get tested because they are worried their parents will be angry. There are many ways for adolescents to be tested for STIs confidentially, without notifying parents.

PREVENTION OF CHLAMYDIA
The best way to prevent an STI like chlamydia is to abstain from sexual activity or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship (with a partner who has been tested). Latex male condoms can reduce the risk of transmission of chlamydia if used consistently and correctly.

HOW CAN I BE TESTED?
• You may be able to be tested at your regular physician’s office or urgent care clinic.
• Planned Parenthood.
• Public health clinics.
• Residents of certain states can use the Web site www.iwantthekit.org for free, valid testing for a few STIs.

SOURCES
http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstf/uspschl.htm
http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5553a1.htm

FOR MORE INFORMATION
http://www.cdc.gov/std/chlamydia/default.htm

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