



Cervicitis

What is cervicitis?

Cervicitis is an inflammation (irritation) of the lining of the cervix. The cervix is the tip of the uterus (womb), and extends down into the vagina. Men have no cervix, and therefore cannot get cervicitis. However, men can get a similar inflammation in the tube of the penis, called urethritis.

What causes cervicitis?

Cervicitis can be a sign of infection. Common infections of the cervix include chlamydia and gonorrhea. Although herpes virus can also cause cervicitis, it usually comes along with visible painful sores on the genital skin.

What are the symptoms of cervicitis?

Most women with cervicitis have no symptoms. If symptoms ARE experienced, they may include abnormal vaginal discharge (drip); bloody spotting between menstrual periods; pain during or after vaginal sex, and spotting after sex. Cervicitis may be accompanied by an infection of the urethra, the tube that empties the bladder, and in these cases, symptoms may include burning or pain during urination.

If you think you may have cervicitis, or if you've been exposed to a sexually transmitted infection that can cause cervicitis, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea, your provider can do tests to see if you're infected, whether you have symptoms or not. *(Giving your doctor a chance to find infections that don't have symptoms is one reason it's so important to get regular check-ups, even when you're not feeling sick!)*

How will I know if I have cervicitis?

Your provider may suspect cervicitis if blood or pus is seen on the tip of your cervix during a pelvic (internal) exam. To test for cervicitis, your provider will collect a sample of fluid from your cervix with a small swab and have it tested at a laboratory. Your provider may also do other tests to find the exact cause of the inflammation.

How is cervicitis treated?

Because cervicitis can be caused by sexually transmitted infections that require immediate attention such as chlamydia and gonorrhea, your provider may treat you with antibiotics even before final laboratory test results are back, just to be safe.

What happens if cervicitis is left untreated?

If left untreated, cervicitis caused by a sexually transmitted infection can cause severe pain and permanent damage to the reproductive system, making it hard or impossible for a woman to get or stay pregnant. Infection of the cervix can also make it easier to get or spread HIV. If you think you have cervicitis, get examined and treated immediately to avoid any complications.

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Cervicitis, Continued

Do sex partners have to be treated?

Yes. If you're diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection of the cervix, it's important to tell everyone you've had sex with over the past 2 months, so that they can be examined and treated too. Take *all* your medication as directed, even if you feel better before the medicine is finished. Don't have sex until you and the people you've had sex with have been completely treated and all symptoms have disappeared, or you could infect each other again.

What if I'm pregnant?

Left untreated in pregnancy, cervicitis caused by a sexually transmitted disease can lead to premature labor and miscarriage. It can also cause infections in the eyes and lungs of the newborn.

All pregnant women should be tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV, as early as possible in pregnancy. You should be tested again during your pregnancy if you are at higher risk for getting an STD. For example, you are at higher risk if you have a new partner during pregnancy, or if you have more than one partner. If left untreated, STDs can be devastating for your baby. To protect yourself and your baby against HIV and other STDs, use a latex condom whenever you have sex.

How can I avoid cervicitis?

Sexually transmitted infections can be avoided by not having sex. *If you are sexually active*, you can reduce your risk of getting infections of the cervix and most other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV, by having sex only in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner you are sure is not infected. If you are having sex outside of such a relationship, you can reduce your risk of STDs by:

- 1) *Always using a latex condom (or other type of latex barrier) whenever you have sex – vaginal, anal, or oral.* Condoms made of “natural” materials, such as lambskin, protect against pregnancy, but not against STDs. If you are allergic to latex, you can use condoms made of polyurethane or other synthetic materials.
- 2) *Limiting the number of people you have sex with.*
The more partners you have, the higher your risk.
- 3) *Avoiding alcohol and drugs when you have sex.* Drinking or getting high makes it much harder to remember to use condoms to protect yourself and others. For free, confidential help with a substance abuse problem, call 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638), or just call 311.

More information

Free, confidential STD exams and treatment, and confidential or anonymous HIV counseling and testing, are available at Health Department clinics in all 5 boroughs of New York City. Health insurance, proof of citizenship, and parental consent are NOT required. For a list of clinics and hours, visit nyc.gov/health, or call 311.