

# Spotlight on Health

## Screening for Chlamydia and Gonorrhea in Young Women

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are infections that can seriously affect your health. Unfortunately, they are becoming more common.<sup>1,2</sup> Young women are at highest risk. However, even though these diseases can be easily diagnosed and treated, less than half of sexually active young women receive screening.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, they don't know that they are infected and are at high risk of complications.

This newsletter will discuss the importance of screening young women for chlamydia and gonorrhea. It will also discuss reasons why screening rates are so low and what can be done to keep young women in your family healthy.

### Young Women Are at High Risk of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea Infection

Young women have the highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea infections.<sup>1</sup> However, only 3 in 100 think they are likely to get chlamydia.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, only 2 in 100 think they are likely to get gonorrhea.<sup>4</sup> Most women with these infections do not have any symptoms and won't seek medical care.<sup>5</sup> This is dangerous because untreated infection may lead to serious complications, including painful diseases of female reproductive organs, as well as fertility and pregnancy problems.<sup>5</sup>

For these reasons, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all sexually active young women be tested for chlamydia and gonorrhea every year. The CDC recommends screening start at 15 years old and continue until women turn 25 years old.<sup>5</sup> Many other physician groups also recommend screening.<sup>6-8</sup>

### Why Are Screening Rates So Low?

Even with the CDC recommendations, many young women who should be screened are not tested.<sup>3</sup> To find out why screening rates are low, Quest Diagnostics surveyed young women, mothers, and healthcare providers about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in 2015 and 2017.<sup>4</sup> Among other findings, the results of the survey suggest the following<sup>4</sup>:

- Many healthcare providers were not following screening guidelines. If they had no symptoms, many sexually active young women were not screened by the healthcare provider.
- Many young women and mothers surveyed did not believe that they, or their daughters, were at risk of chlamydia and gonorrhea infections.
- Not enough patients ask for screening, and not enough healthcare providers offer it.



### Communication Between Mothers and Daughters

The surveys conducted by Quest Diagnostics suggested that communication between mothers and daughters could be better.<sup>4</sup> Differences in their responses to the survey questions reflect their different perspectives on communication:

- Less than one-third of young women (30%) compared to four-fifths (80%) of mothers say that they have discussed reproductive health (eg, safe sex, STIs, going to the gynecologist).
- Almost all young women (88%) would prefer to be alone with their healthcare provider when talking about sex or STIs, but over one-third (35%) of mothers spend some or all of the time in the exam room during their daughters' visits.

## Keeping Young Women in Your Family Healthy

Knowing that screening rates are low, and why they are low, you can take actions to keep yourself, or your daughter, healthy.

As a young woman, you can

- Educate yourself about chlamydia and gonorrhea.
- Be honest with your healthcare provider about your sexual history.
- Find another healthcare provider if your provider does not want to discuss topics related to sex, or does not want to do screening.
- Ask to be tested every year if you are sexually active and less than 25 years old.

As parents of a young woman, you can

- Understand that treating an infection quickly can protect your daughter's health—untreated infections can lead to lifelong consequences, including infertility.
- Talk to your daughter about her reproductive health (See Sidebar on previous page). Let her know that it's very important to be completely honest with her healthcare team, and that she ask to be tested for chlamydia/gonorrhea every year.
- Talk to your daughter's healthcare provider and tell them you believe screening according to guidelines is appropriate.

## How Your Healthcare Provider Can Help

Your healthcare provider can do a simple test for chlamydia or gonorrhea infection. If the test is positive, your provider can prescribe antibiotics to treat the infection and give advice to help avoid getting the infection again.

## How the Laboratory Can Help

To find out if a chlamydia or gonorrhea infection is present, Quest Diagnostics performs tests on samples collected by your healthcare provider.

## Additional Information

For more information, visit Quest Diagnostics at [letstalkaboutstds.com](http://letstalkaboutstds.com), or these helpful websites:

- **CDC:** [CDC.gov/std/chlamydia/stdfact-chlamydia.htm](http://CDC.gov/std/chlamydia/stdfact-chlamydia.htm) and [CDC.gov/std/gonorrhea/stdfact-gonorrhea.htm](http://CDC.gov/std/gonorrhea/stdfact-gonorrhea.htm)
- **Center for Young Women's Health:** [youngwomenshealth.org/2013/01/16/sti-information/](http://youngwomenshealth.org/2013/01/16/sti-information/)
- **MedlinePlus:** [MedlinePlus.gov/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html](http://MedlinePlus.gov/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html)

Models used for illustrative purposes.

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