Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT) for Chlamydia/Gonorrhea Infection

GUIDE FOR SEX PARTNERS

What are chlamydia and gonorrhea?
Chlamydia and gonorrhea are sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) caused by bacteria. They can infect the reproductive and genital tracts, throat, and rectum, depending on the type of sex a person had. People with infection may not have any symptoms, or might only have mild symptoms. When present, symptoms of both chlamydia and gonorrhea can include burning or pain with urination, penile or vaginal discharge, and pain or swelling in the testicles. Rectal infection can also cause rectal pain, bleeding, or discharge, and throat infection can cause a sore throat. More serious complications of chlamydia and gonorrhea include infection of the internal reproductive organs called Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), infertility (inability to become pregnant), and ectopic pregnancy (an abnormal pregnancy that develops outside of the uterus). Gonorrhea can also spread to the blood and joints, which can be life-threatening.

Even without symptoms, both chlamydia and gonorrhea can be passed on to sex partners. Having an untreated sex partner is an important risk factor for repeat infection and complications. Treating the sex partners of a person diagnosed with chlamydia or gonorrhea is important to stop the spread of these STDs.

Why am I getting antibiotics or a prescription for antibiotics?
One of your sex partners has been diagnosed with and treated for either chlamydia, gonorrhea, or both. Chlamydia and gonorrhea are both sexually transmitted diseases. You also need to be treated because you are at risk of having an infection and could develop serious health problems, re-infect your sex partner, or pass it on to others if you are not treated.

A healthcare provider has given your sex partner antibiotics or an antibiotic prescription to give to you so that you can be treated for chlamydia and/or gonorrhea as soon as possible. This practice is called Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT) and is a convenient, fast and private way for you to get treated for chlamydia and/or gonorrhea without needing to first see a healthcare provider.

If you are given an antibiotic prescription, you can fill the prescription at any pharmacy. Before you can fill the prescription, however, it should have your name, date of birth and address listed. If these pieces of information are missing, you should fill them in prior to bringing the prescription to a pharmacy. If you have questions about the prescription or the antibiotics, you should talk with your healthcare provider or a pharmacist.
Is Expedited Partner Therapy safe?
Healthcare providers are allowed to provide antibiotics or an antibiotic prescription to patients diagnosed with chlamydia and/or gonorrhea so they can give it to their sex partners. You should fully read through this informational sheet and the medication information that accompanies your prescription from the pharmacy (if you’re given an antibiotic prescription to fill) before taking any antibiotics. These antibiotics are safe and effective when used as directed to treat chlamydia and/or gonorrhea infections in the vagina, penis, or rectum. These antibiotics may not be as effective in treating gonorrhea infections of the throat. Even if you take these antibiotics, you should still follow up with a healthcare provider to be evaluated and tested for other STDs.

What antibiotics will be given or prescribed to me to treat chlamydia and/or gonorrhea?
Gonorrhea infections need treatment with two different antibiotics to be effective. The two antibiotics used to treat gonorrhea are called azithromycin and cefixime, and both should be taken together to effectively treat gonorrhea.

Chlamydia is easier to treat and only requires one antibiotic to cure an infection. The one antibiotic we recommend health care providers use to treat chlamydia is azithromycin. Because azithromycin is also used to treat gonorrhea, someone treated for gonorrhea will also end up being treated for chlamydia.

How should I take the antibiotics?
If you’re given an antibiotic prescription to fill at a pharmacy, information from the pharmacist will accompany your prescription when you pick it up and will explain how to take the antibiotics.

Cefixime and azithromycin antibiotics are usually very well tolerated, but they may cause you to feel like you have an upset stomach (i.e., nausea and throwing up). You may want to take them with food because they are better tolerated with some food in your stomach. If you throw up after taking the antibiotics, you should contact a healthcare provider for further evaluation and treatment.

You should NOT TAKE these antibiotics if any of the following are true:
- You have lower abdominal or pelvic pain or discomfort, pain during sex, pain in the testicles, or a fever. These symptoms could be an indication of a more serious infection that might require different treatment.
- You are feeling nauseous and are throwing up. This could prevent the antibiotics from being absorbed into your body and working effectively.
- You are allergic or have had a bad reaction in the past to any of the antibiotics, or similar antibiotics, being prescribed to you.
- Cefixime: do not take if you ever had a bad reaction to cefixime (Suprax), or other cephalosporin or penicillin class antibiotics.
- Azithromycin: do not take if you ever had a bad reaction to azithromycin (Zithromax) or other “macrolide” class antibiotics, including but not limited to erythromycin and clarithromycin (Biaxin).
- You have a personal history of, or are at risk for, a heart arrhythmia (such as “QT prolongation”) which could be worsened by taking azithromycin.
- You are pregnant or breastfeeding.

If any of the above is true, you should not take the antibiotics but see a health care provider as soon as possible for evaluation and treatment.

Additionally, prescribed antibiotics come with additional information from the pharmacist, and we recommended you review this information prior to taking. If you have any questions or concerns about the antibiotics, or if you are concerned the antibiotics could interact with other medications you are already on, you should talk with a pharmacist or your healthcare provider.

**Is it possible to have a serious reaction to these antibiotics?**
If you’ve taken antibiotics like these before and tolerated them, it is unlikely that you will have any serious side effects. As with any medication, however, some people can have a serious allergic reaction that can cause trouble breathing, chest tightness, closing of the throat, swelling of the lips or tongue and hives (itchy bumps on the skin); this type of reaction is called anaphylaxis and can be life threatening. If you have any of these symptoms after taking these antibiotics, immediately call 911 and urgently seek medical care.

**Why should I take the antibiotics?**
If not treated, chlamydia and gonorrhea infections can both lead to serious and permanent health problems including infertility (not being able to have children) and a serious infection of the internal reproductive organs in women called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can lead to future pregnancy complications such as ectopic pregnancies (a pregnancy that develops outside of the uterus). Chlamydia and gonorrhea can also cause a painful infection of the testicles in men. Gonorrhea can also spread to the blood and joints, which can be life-threatening. Finally, not treating chlamydia or gonorrhea can cause your sex partner to have repeated infections and the infection can spread to other sex partners.

**What if I don’t take the antibiotics?**
If you decide not to take the antibiotics, you should see a healthcare provider to be evaluated and tested as soon as possible for chlamydia, gonorrhea and other STDs.

**Will these antibiotics cure other STDs?**
These antibiotics are for the treatment of chlamydia and/or gonorrhea. There are other possible STDs that will not be treated with these antibiotics, including HIV and syphilis, which you should also be evaluated for. You should see a healthcare provider for further evaluation even if you take these antibiotics.
I don’t feel sick. Should I still take these antibiotics?
Yes. People with a chlamydia or gonorrhea infection may not feel sick or have any symptoms, but you might still have an infection that can cause long-term health problems and that can spread to others. Taking the antibiotics should cure a chlamydia and/or gonorrhea infection.

What if I am pregnant or think I may be pregnant?
If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, you should not take the antibiotics without first being evaluated by a healthcare provider. You should see your healthcare provider as soon as possible to be tested and treated for STDs, which can be passed to your baby during pregnancy or delivery. Tell the provider your sex partner had chlamydia and/or gonorrhea.

What should I do after taking the antibiotics?
The antibiotics take about 7 days to fully treat the chlamydia and/or gonorrhea infection. You should not have sex (vaginal, oral, or anal) for at least 7 days after being treated. You can get chlamydia and/or gonorrhea again if you have sex before the antibiotics cure you and your partner. You should also see a healthcare provider and get checked for other STDs, including HIV and syphilis. Even if you take the antibiotics, it is possible to have more than one STD at a time.

How do I avoid sexually transmitted diseases?
The only way to completely avoid STDs is to not have sex. If you choose to have sex, please do it safely by using a latex condom every time and for every kind of sex (oral, anal or vaginal sex). You can also reduce your chances of getting STDs by limiting the number of people you have sex with. The more sex partners you have, the higher your risk of getting an STD.

What if I have questions?
You can call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services’ Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at (603) 271-4496 or the phone number on the prescription. There is additional information on the DHHS website at https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/bchs/std/ept.htm.