



PELVIC INFLAMMATORY DISEASE (PID)

What is pelvic inflammatory disease?

Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is the infection of the fallopian tubes (tubes that carry eggs from the ovary to the womb) and other internal reproductive organs in women. PID occurs in women only and is a common and serious complication of some sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

How do women get PID?

PID occurs when bacteria move upward from a woman's vagina or cervix (opening to the uterus) into her reproductive organs. Many different organisms can cause PID, but many cases are associated with gonorrhea and chlamydia, two very common bacterial STDs. A prior episode of PID increases the risk of another episode because the reproductive organs may be damaged during the initial bout of infection.

What are the signs and symptoms of PID?

Symptoms of PID vary from none to severe. A woman may experience mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, while serious damage is being done to her reproductive organs. Because of vague symptoms, PID goes unrecognized by women and their health care providers about two thirds of the time. Women who have symptoms of PID most commonly have lower abdominal pain. Other signs and symptoms include fever, unusual vaginal discharge that may have a foul odor, painful intercourse, painful urination, irregular menstrual bleeding, and in rare cases, pain in the right upper abdomen.

How is PID diagnosed?

PID is difficult to diagnose because the symptoms are often subtle and mild. The health care provider may order tests to identify the infection-causing organism (e.g., chlamydial or gonorrheal infection) or to distinguish between PID and other problems with similar symptoms.

How is PID treated?

PID can be cured with several types of antibiotics. However, antibiotic treatment does not reverse any damage that has already occurred to the reproductive organs.

Who is at risk for PID?

Sexually active women in their childbearing years are most at risk. Those under age 25 are more likely to develop PID than those older than 25. Women who douche or have an intrauterine device (IUD) may have a higher risk of developing PID than women who do not.



What are the complications of PID?

Without treatment, PID can cause permanent damage to the female reproductive organs. Infection-causing bacteria can silently invade the fallopian tubes, causing normal tissue to turn to scar tissue. The scar tissue can block or interrupt the normal movement of eggs into the uterus. If the fallopian tubes are totally blocked by scar tissue, sperm cannot fertilize an egg, and the woman becomes infertile. Infertility also can occur if the fallopian tubes are partially blocked or even slightly damaged.

How can PID be prevented?

The surest way to avoid transmission of STDs is to abstain from sexual contact or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Latex or polyurethane male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of most STDs. Women can also prevent PID by getting early treatment if they do get an STD.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- 1-800-232-4636, TTY: 1-888-232-6348 in English and Spanish
- Infertility, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/infertility/default.htm>
- Treatment guidelines, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/pid.htm>
- PID fact sheet, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/pid/stdfact-pid-detailed.htm>