**Everything you need to know about Ureaplasma**

**What is Ureaplasma?**

*Ureaplasma* is bacterium that is commonly found in people’s urinary or genital tract. It is a parasitic, which means it needs a host, such as a human or animal, to survive. *Ureaplasma* bacteria are part of the body’s bacterial population, and the live-in balance, without causing a problem, in most cases. Sometimes, however, they can increase in population, causing infection and health problems.

*Ureaplasma* belongs to a class of bacteria known as *Mycoplasma*. The *Mycoplasma* species are the smallest known organisms of their type that can make a copy of themselves to reproduce. They are so tiny they can’t be seen through a microscope.

*Ureaplasma* does not have a cell wall, which make it unique among bacteria. The lack of a cell wall makes it resistant to some common antibiotics including penicillin, cephalosporins, and sulphonamides. However, it can be treated with other antibiotics.

Most people have *Ureaplasma* in their bodies and never know it. But, Ureaplasma has been linked to diseases and conditions that affect the male and female reproductive systems. It can also infect newborns if the mother passes the bacteria to the infant during pregnancy.

**Transmission**

*Ureaplasma* can be passed during sexual contact. One study found that vaginal infections with *Ureaplasma* were higher among women who had multiple sexual partners.

These bacteria may also be passed to a fetus or newborn of the mother has *Ureaplasma* infection during pregnancy.

Newborns may develop:

* Pneumonia
* Meningitis and brain injury
* Lung injury and breathing problems (respiratory distress)

Ureaplasma infections in pregnant women can cause:

* Premature rupture of membranes
* Miscarriage
* Premature birth
* Stillbirth

Pregnant women can be treated for Ureaplasma infections which reduces the risk of these complications.

**Trouble getting pregnant**

Ureaplasma bacteria have been found in both men and women with infertility problems. Infertility is defined as trying to conceive for 12 months without success.

The bacteria may affect the number of sperm and their ability to move in men. In women, it may cause an infection that make pregnancy more difficult to achieve.

One study found that a particular *Ureaplasma* bacteria known as *Ureaplasma urealyticum* is seen more often in women with unexplained infertility. As a result, it may be prudent that women with unexplained infertility be tested for *Ureaplasma*.

A genital tract infection may cause up to 15% of all cases of male infertility, but not all of these are due to Ureaplasma. Many of them are a result of sexually transmitted infections, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea.

A review of research on *Ureaplasma urealyticum* was associated with a higher risk of infertility in men. Another type, *Ureaplasma parvum*, was not linked to male infertility.

**Ureaplasma in pregnant women and newborns**

*Ureaplasma* does not cause symptoms if it is living in balance with other bacteria. A healthy immune system can usually keep the bacteria in check, preventing them from causing infection. If the *Ureaplasma* population increases, certain health problems may develop and cause symptoms. The following are possible signs of a *Ureaplasma* infection. People should note that *Ureaplasma* may not be the only cause of these issues.

**Pain, Discharge, and itching in the genital area**

Ureaplasma infection may cause some conditions that lead to pain and discomfort in the genital area. They include:

* **Urethritis:** An inflammation of the urethra or tube that carries urine out of the body. Urethritis can cause pain or burning while urinating or with intercourse, itching around the urethra, unusual or foul-smelling discharge.
* **Bacterial Vaginosis (BV):** An infection of the vagina. BV can cause foul-smelling or unusual vaginal discharge (usually watery), itching in and around the vagina, and burning during urination. *Ureaplasma* can be a cause of repeated occurrences of BV.

**Pelvic or abdominal pain**

Ureaplasma has been linked to several different health problems that can cause pain in the pelvic, abdominal or groin area. These include:

* **Prostatitis:** An inflammation of the prostate gland. Prostatitis may cause pain during urination, cloudy or bloody urine, difficulty urinating, pain in the genital area or an urgent need to urinate.
* **Endometritis:** An inflammation of the lining of the womb. This can cause pelvic pain, abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge and fever. Endometritis can be caused by different bacteria, but Ureaplasma infection has been linked to the condition as well.
* **Kidney stones:** *Ureaplasma* may play a role in the formation of kidney stones in some people. Kidney stones can cause severe pain in the pelvic area/lower back/abdomen, fever, problems urinating, and cloudy, bloody, or foul-smelling urine.

**How is Ureaplasma diagnosed?**

A biopsy or swab, which is tested in a lab, is used to diagnose *Ureaplasma*. The biopsy or swab may be taken from the vagina, uterine lining, urethra, or urine sample.

Due to its small size, *Ureaplasma* is nearly impossible to see under a microscope. Identifying *Ureaplasma* requires specialized lab tests and equipment.

**Treatment**

Antibiotics are needed to treat *Ureaplasma* infections. However, only certain antibiotics are effective against these bacteria.

The antibiotic chosen depends upon the health problem being addressed, and who is being treated. Certain antibiotics are not safe for pregnant women or newborns.

Urinary tract or genital infections caused by *Ureaplasma* may be treated with Azithromycin or Doxycycline.

If the bacteria do not respond to these drugs, fluoroquinolones may be used. Newborns with lung problems caused by Ureaplasma may be treated with Erythromycin. Pregnant women with premature rupture of membranes may be treated with macrolide antibiotics. These include clarithromycin, azithromycin, and/or erythromycin.

**How do you prevent Ureaplasma infections?**

Only abstaining from sexual contact can prevent *Ureaplasma* transmission. But some people may have *Ureaplasma* colonization without having sex.

*Ureaplasma* is considered an opportunistic bacterium, which means it is found in both healthy people and those with certain diseases.

Opportunistic bacteria may be able to make someone sick when an illness, stress, or other opportunity weakens the immune system and allows it to multiply and further invade the body.

Getting treatment for medical conditions and having regular check-ups with a provider may help prevent these opportunities from occurring.

**Outlook**

The outlook for *Ureaplasma* infection depends upon what health problems it is causing, and the severity of the condition. Fortunately, certain antibiotics are effective against the bacteria and often clear up infections when taken as directed.

Pregnant women should see their OB/GYN provider regularly for prenatal check-ups and should discuss any unusual symptoms. This can help avoid any complications for the mother or baby.