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Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at Bouchard Insurance.

Women's Health: Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

Each year in the United States, an estimated 1 million women experience an episode of acute Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). Each year PID causes infertility in more than 100,000 women and around 150 deaths resulting from complications.

What is it?

PID is a general term that refers to infection of the uterus, fallopian tubes and other reproductive organs. It is a common and serious complication of some sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), especially Chlamydia and gonorrhea. It occurs when bacteria move upward from a woman's vagina or cervix into her reproductive organs. PID can damage the fallopian tubes and tissues in and near the uterus and ovaries.

Risk Factors

Sexually active women in their childbearing years are most at risk for PID, as well as:

- Women under age 25, when the cervix is not yet fully matured
- Women with multiple sex partners
- Those who have had PID in the past
- Women who douche
- Those who have an intrauterine birth control device (IUD)

Symptoms

Many episodes of PID go undetected because the symptoms are usually subtle or mild, and therefore the woman may not recognize what is occurring. The most common indicators are:

- Lower abdominal pain
- Fever
- Unusual vaginal discharge, which may have an odor
- Painful intercourse or urination
- Irregular menstrual bleeding
- Pain in the right upper abdomen, although this is rare

Discovering PID

There is no precise test for PID, so a diagnosis is usually based on clinical findings. A pelvic ultrasound is a helpful procedure; it can view the pelvic area to see whether the fallopian tubes are enlarged or if an abscess is present. Some physicians may suggest a laparoscopy, a minor surgical procedure in which a tube with a lighted end is inserted into the lower abdomen.

Treatment

Left untreated, PID can lead to serious consequences, including

infertility, ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy in the fallopian tube or elsewhere outside of the womb), formation of abscesses and chronic pelvic pain. The usual form of treatment is antibiotics, but these do not reverse the damage PID has already caused. Hospitalization may be required if a woman is severely ill, pregnant, is not responding to medication or has an abscess in the fallopian tube. Surgery may be needed.

Prevention

Untreated STDs are the main cause of PID. The surest way to protect against PID is to abstain from sexual intercourse. Male condoms can also decrease risk of contraction. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that sexually active women ages 25 and older get a yearly Chlamydia test.



Did You Know...?

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention site – www.cdc.gov, or the American Social Health Association (ASHA) – www.asha4std.org. You can also call 1-800-CDC-INFO for STD information and referrals to STD clinics.