



Syphilis Fact Sheet

Syphilis (Si-fil-liss) is a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) caused by a type of bacteria called *Treponema pallidum*. Syphilis can infect men, women, and newborns.

Q: How is syphilis spread?

A: Syphilis is spread from person to person during vaginal, oral, or anal sex. A pregnant woman can pass syphilis to her baby.

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Q: What are the signs and symptoms of syphilis?

A: Some people do not get any symptoms when they have syphilis.

Symptoms of PRIMARY STAGE SYPHILIS: (10 to 90 days after becoming infected):

- A skin sore called a chancre (shank-er)
Chancres are typically round, firm, and not painful. They are usually on the penis, scrotum, vaginal lips, anus, or mouth.
- Women may not notice the painless sores because they can be inside the vagina.
- Lymph glands near the sore may be swollen but are usually not painful.

 **EVEN WITHOUT TREATMENT, THESE SORES WILL GO AWAY -- BUT YOU ARE STILL INFECTED!**

Symptoms of SECONDARY STAGE SYPHILIS may develop after the primary stage. Symptoms of secondary syphilis are different from person to person.

- Skin rash, which can be widespread all over the body: the rash can be on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, and is usually not itchy. Sometimes the rash can be hard to notice.
- Bumps (like warts) or flat, white patches in the mouth, on the genitals, or in the rectal area
- Flu-like illness with sore throat, headache, and fever
- Patchy hair loss on the head (not balding)
- Nervous system symptoms are rare but possible. They include headaches, hearing loss, and visual changes.

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Q: Is syphilis serious?

A: **Yes!** Without treatment, syphilis can cause brain damage, blindness, heart disease, and other health problems. These health problems may take 5 to 20 years or more to develop.

- A pregnant woman can pass syphilis to her unborn baby, causing serious illness or death. If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, be sure to tell your doctor or nurse.
- A person with an open sore caused by syphilis has a greater chance of giving or getting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Q: How is syphilis treated?

- A:**
- Your doctor or nurse will give you medicine that cures syphilis infection.
 - If you have syphilis, your partner(s) must be treated, even if they have no symptoms. If they are not treated, they can give the infection back to you, or infect others.
 - Your health care provider will give you medicine to cure syphilis infection.
 - If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, be sure to tell your doctor or nurse.
 - Ask your doctor about the need for follow-up tests.
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Q: How do I avoid getting syphilis?

- A:**
- Abstinence (not having sex) is the only sure way to avoid infection.
 - Plan Ahead:** Think about protecting yourself. Talk with your sex partner(s) about STDs and the need to protect yourself. Then, you can choose not to have sex (abstinence), or decide to:
 - Use a male condom with each sex partner.
 - Use a female condom when a male condom cannot be used.
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HIV IS ALSO A STD!

When you catch syphilis, you could also be getting HIV.

Birth control pills or a birth control shot cannot protect you against syphilis or other STDs.



USING LATEX CONDOMS CORRECTLY EVERY TIME YOU HAVE SEX CAN REDUCE THE CHANCE FOR TRANSMISSION OF SYPHILIS ONLY IF THE INFECTED AREAS ARE COVERED OR PROTECTED BY THE CONDOM.

Q: Where can I get more information about STDs and referrals for STD testing?

- A:**
- **Phone:** Talk to a trained operator who can answer your questions and provide information about STD testing. **In English and Español 24 hours/day, 7 days/week:** Toll-free: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636); TTY for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: 1-888-232-6348
 - **Internet:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/>
http://www.cdc.gov/std/healthcomm/fact_sheets.htm

Talk to your own health care provider, or call your county health department by looking for the telephone number in the phone book (white pages) under county government. Ask to speak to someone in the STD clinic or STD program for more information about syphilis.