



# Syphilis Facts

## What is it?

Syphilis is a serious disease. It spreads by genital, anal or oral sex with an infected person. The first sign is a painless sore (ulcer) where the germ entered the body. The second stage is a body rash, which comes weeks later. Syphilis affects the whole body.

Syphilis symptoms go away in six months even with no treatment, but the germs are still spreading in your body. Years later syphilis enters its third stage. This may cause heart disease, brain damage or death. Early treatment can protect against this.

People with genital sores may have a greater chance of getting HIV infection. If a person has HIV infection, the second and third stage of syphilis may come sooner and be more serious.

## How do you get it?

By direct contact, usually sexual, with the sores, rashes or body fluids (semen, blood, vaginal secretions) of infected people.

## What is the incubation period?

The incubation period for acquired syphilis is typically three weeks, but can range from 10 to 90 days.

## How is syphilis treated?

With antibiotics, usually penicillin. If a person is treated with penicillin he may be given one or more injections a week apart. It is important to go each week for the injection until treatment is finished. It is necessary to avoid sexual intercourse until the treatment of both partners and the doctor of clinic says they can no longer infect others.

## How communicable is it?

A person can pass it on mainly to their sex partners(s). Without treatment, you are infectious (able to pass syphilis to others) for the first two years after getting the disease. Many people who have syphilis do not notice any problems. Tell your sex partner(s) as far back as necessary. The length of time depends on how long you have had the disease. They may have it and not know it. Your public health nurse will contact your partner(s) if you prefer. Your name will be kept confidential.

Pregnant women with syphilis can give the disease to their unborn children. Syphilis may cause birth defects. Doctors/clinics usually do a syphilis test at the first visit of every pregnant woman.

You can have sex again when you and your partner(s) have finished treatment, and the doctor or clinic says you can no longer infect others.

## Is follow-up important?

Yes. It is important that you return for a check-up to be sure your disease has been cured.

### Remember:

- Finish the treatment your doctor or clinic prescribes.
- Avoid alcohol while taking antibiotics.
- Return for follow-up blood tests as your doctor or clinic asks.
- People you have had sex with during the past should be examined and treated according to the stage of syphilis you are at.
- Use condoms to lower the chance of infections in future.

*If you are worried or have more questions, call your local health unit or STD clinic.*



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