

# SYPHILIS

## What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*. The infection progresses in stages.

## How is syphilis spread?

Syphilis is passed to a partner during sexual contact (vaginal, oral, or anal).

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms will vary depending on the stage of the infection:

### Primary Syphilis (1st Stage)

- Symptoms usually develop 3 days to 3 months after contact.
- A painless open sore develops around the genitals, rectum and/or mouth.
- The sore will heal on its own, but the infection remains.

### Secondary Syphilis (2nd Stage)

- Symptoms usually develop 2 to 24 weeks after exposure.
- A rash can develop anywhere on the body, including on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet.
- Flu-like symptoms develop, including headache, slight fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, weight loss, and sore throat.

### Latent Syphilis (3rd Stage)

- Latent syphilis occurs after secondary syphilis.
- Typically, there are no symptoms.

## How can I be tested for syphilis?

A blood test is done.

## How is syphilis treated?

- A doctor will give you antibiotics.
- Avoid all sex (oral, anal, and/or vaginal) for 7 days after taking the medication.
- Do not have sex with your current partner until they are tested and treated.

## What about partners?

Individuals who test positive for syphilis are asked to tell all sexual partners so they can be tested and/or treated. A public health nurse is able to help contact sexual partners as needed.

## Is follow up needed?

Yes. After treatment, blood tests are needed to show that the infection has been treated properly.

### **Things to think about:**

- Longstanding, untreated syphilis can damage the heart, the nervous system and other major organs.
- Individuals infected with syphilis are at greater risk of getting and spreading other STIs, including HIV.
- Taking medication will treat syphilis but any damage that has been done to the body before treatment cannot be reversed.

### **How can I reduce my chances of getting and spreading syphilis?**

- Avoid sex.
- Use condoms/dental dams every time you have sex, even if you are using another form of birth control.
- Do not share sex toys.

### **To reduce your risk of STIs, get tested:**

- After your last partner, before every new partner
- After unprotected sex, injection drug use, snorting or crack pipes
- To help prevent STIs, get vaccinated against hepatitis A, B, and HPV.

**For more information, please contact The Clinic at 519-663-5317.**

Reference:

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada Retrieved from <http://www.sexandu.ca>

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