PROTECT YOURSELF + PROTECT YOUR PARTNER

syphilis

THE FACTS

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- Syphilis (SI fi lis) is a sexually transmitted disease (STD).
- Anyone can get syphilis.
- Many people who have syphilis don't know it. You can have syphilis even if you don't notice any symptoms.
- The first symptom is a painless, round, and red sore that can appear anywhere you've had sex.
- You can pass syphilis to others without knowing it.
- Washing the genitals, urinating, or douching after sex will **not** prevent syphilis.
- Syphilis is easy to treat and cure.
- If you do not treat syphilis, it can lead to serious health problems.

PROTECT YOURSELF + PROTECT YOUR PARTNER

HOW DOES SOMEONE GET SYPHILIS?

- You can get syphilis by having sex with someone who has it. “Having sex” means having oral, anal, or vaginal contact.
- You can get syphilis when your mouth, genitals, or another part of your body touches a syphilis sore on a person who has the disease.
- If you are pregnant, you can pass syphilis on to your baby even if you don’t know you are infected.

Can I get syphilis by having oral sex?

Yes. Syphilis sores can be in the mouth as well as on the genitals. If you give or receive oral sex, you may expose yourself to syphilis. This is true even if you can't see a sore. Using a condom for oral sex can reduce your risk.

Can pregnant women get syphilis?

Yes, a woman can get syphilis when she is pregnant. Being pregnant does not protect you or your baby against any STD.
If you are pregnant and you think you may have syphilis, see your doctor right away because you can pass the infection to your baby during pregnancy.

Syphilis is extremely serious for babies. Your doctor can recommend medicine that is safe to take while you're pregnant.

What are the symptoms of syphilis?

The disease has four stages: primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary.

PRIMARY STAGE SYMPTOMS

During the primary stage of syphilis, you may have one or more painless sores on the genitals or in the mouth, anus, or rectum. The name for this type of sore is a chancre (SHANK er).

The sore is likely to be wherever you had sex. If you had oral sex, it might be in your mouth or on your genitals. It does not hurt, so you might not even notice you have a sore unless you look for it.

The sore lasts 3 to 6 weeks, and it heals on its own. If you don't get treatment, the disease will progress to the next stage.

SECONDARY STAGE SYMPTOMS

During the secondary stage of syphilis, you might have a rash on your hands and feet or on other parts of your body. Syphilis rashes are often red or brown and usually don't itch. Other symptoms may include fever, sore throat, muscle aches, headaches, hair loss, and feeling tired. These symptoms may go away on their own. If you don't get treatment, the disease will progress to the next stage.

LATENT STAGE SYMPTOMS

In the latent stage of the disease, you have no symptoms, but the disease can be detected by a blood test from your doctor. Syphilis can remain hidden for many years in the latent stage.

TERTIARY STAGE SYMPTOMS

Tertiary stage syphilis is very serious. It can begin after you've had untreated syphilis for a while, possibly many years—even if you never noticed symptoms. Symptoms of tertiary syphilis may include difficulty moving your arms and legs, paralysis, numbness, blindness, and heart disease.

How can I find out if I have syphilis?

Ask your doctor to give you a blood test for syphilis.

When should I be tested?

You should be tested for syphilis right away if:

- You have any symptoms, such as a painless, round sore that may appear on your genitals or in your mouth.
- Your partner has syphilis or symptoms that might be syphilis, even if you don't have symptoms.
- Every pregnant woman should be tested for syphilis. Tell your doctor if you plan to become pregnant.

How is syphilis treated?

One shot of penicillin, an antibiotic, will cure a person who has had syphilis for less than a year. More doses are needed to treat someone who has had syphilis for longer than a year.

Can I get syphilis again after I've been treated?

Yes, you can get syphilis again. You can get it from an untreated partner or a new partner who is infected.

If I have syphilis, what does that mean for my partner?

- Your partner may have syphilis, too.
- Be sure to tell your recent sex partners, so they can get tested and treated.
- Avoid having sex until you've both been treated, so you don't re-infect each other.
- Avoid sexual contact with anyone if you see an unusual sore.

What happens if I don't get treated?

- Syphilis stays in your body if it is not treated.
- It can damage your heart, brain, eyes, and other organs. This damage may not show up for many years and could kill you.
- You might also pass the disease on to other people.

Does syphilis affect my risk of getting HIV?

Yes. If you have syphilis, you have a higher chance of getting HIV. If you have syphilis and HIV, you can spread both diseases more easily.

How can I lower my risk for syphilis?

- The **surest way** to prevent syphilis is not to have sex or to have sex only with someone who's not infected and who has sex only with you.
- Condoms can reduce your risk of getting syphilis if used the right way every single time you have sex. But a condom protects only the area it covers. Areas the condom doesn't cover can become infected.
- Using drugs or alcohol may increase your risk of getting syphilis.
- Get a blood test from your doctor once a year in case you got syphilis and don't know it.

A message for everyone

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR PARTNER.

Always see a doctor if your partner is being treated for syphilis. You and your partner need to be treated. Also see the doctor if you or your partner notice any symptoms, such as a painless red sore.

If you have syphilis, you should be tested for other STDs. Be sure to tell your recent sex partners, so they can get tested too. Talk openly and honestly with your partner about syphilis and other STDs.

For more information

- Talk to your doctor.
- Call 1-800-CDC-INFO.
- Visit www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis.

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