

Syphilis

Talk to your partner(s) about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and your health before you have sex. You can pass on an STI without knowing you have one. During sex, you can use latex condoms to lower your chances of getting STIs.

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is an infection that is caused by bacteria. It is a reportable infection, meaning that if you test positive for Syphilis, you will be contacted by a clinic or health department and asked to provide the contact information for current and past sexual partners for notification and testing purposes. Your name is not disclosed when a current or past sexual partner is notified.

How do you get syphilis?

You can get syphilis if you have oral sex, vaginal sex, anal sex or share a needle with a person who already has the infection. Syphilis can cause sores around the genitals and mouth, and a rash on the skin. The infection can be passed on through these sores and the rash. Some people with syphilis may have no sores or rash, but can still pass on the infection. A pregnant woman with syphilis can pass on the infection to her baby before it is born.

How can you tell if you have syphilis?

Most people that have syphilis have no symptoms. They can unknowingly pass the infection to their partners. Symptoms usually happen in 3 stages:

Stage One:

- ★ Within the first 10 to 90 days, you may notice a painless sore called a chancre on or near the point of infection (penis, buttocks, vagina, anus, mouth or throat)
- ★ If the sore is not treated, the infection will continue to spread.

Stage Two

- ★ Three to 16 months after the chancre first appears, you may get a rash on the palms of your hand, soles of your feet, chest and/or back.
- ★ You may feel like you have the flu.
- ★ In some cases you may experience patchy hair loss, muscle and joint pain and swollen glands.

It is important to use condoms or a latex barrier with sexual partners to decrease the risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection.

Stage Three:

- ★ If left untreated, you may develop problems with your brain, liver, heart and other arteries. It may also lead to bone disease and blindness. You may experience these symptoms from 10 to 20 years after first becoming infected.

How do you get tested for syphilis?

A blood test can confirm whether or not you have syphilis. It can take between 2 to 12 weeks for the infection to show up in your blood.

How is syphilis treated?

You should be treated for syphilis as soon as you find out that you have it. Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics, usually penicillin. You will get one or more injections of penicillin, on a weekly basis. It is important to go each week for your injection until the treatment is finished. If you are allergic to penicillin, you will be given another antibiotic. You should tell your sexual partner(s) that you have syphilis. They need to get treated too.

Do you need a follow-up test?

Yes. The clinician will do several blood tests over the next two years to make sure that the infection is gone.

How do you prevent passing the infection on to your partner(s)?

Once you have had a negative follow up test, you can no longer pass on the infection, and you are cured. Until you have a negative follow up test, you may be able to pass on the infection and should abstain from unprotected sexual activity.

If you need further information or would like to book an appointment, call:

Planned Parenthood Toronto Health Services for youth ages 13 to 29. 416-927-7171. Health Services offers same-day, scheduled and drop-in appointments. For more information visit www.ppt.on.ca.

Women's Programming at the Bay Centre for Birth Control for women of all ages at 416-351-3700.

Youth can also access information about sexual health by calling the Teen Sex InfoLine at 416-961-3200 or chat live using MSN messenger at spiderbytes@hotmail.com from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Wednesday and 12 noon to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. You can also email us a question anytime at askus@spiderbytes.ca or visit www.spiderbytes.ca.