



Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by bacteria.

Syphilis

How is it spread?

Men get syphilis from sexual contact with someone who has it. Anyone with syphilis can spread it to others. Those who have it may not show signs or know they have it. Syphilis can be spread by contact with a syphilis sore which occurs on external genitals, vagina, anus, or in the rectum. Syphilis can be spread between:

- ▶ Men and women.
- ▶ Men and men.

What are signs of syphilis in men?

There are four stages of syphilis. Each is defined by how long the person has had it. Signs vary in each stage.

- 1. Primary Stage:** The first sign of syphilis is often a small, round, firm sore. These appear at the place where it entered the body such as the penis, tongue, or lips. Most do not cause pain. There can also be more than one sore. Signs often go away in about 3 to 6 weeks even without treatment. If not treated in this stage, it will progress into the other stages.

2. Secondary Stage: This stage can start with a rash over one or more areas of the body. These appear mostly on the palms of the hands and the bottoms of the feet. Other signs may be:

- Sores in the mouth or anus.
- Sore throat.
- Swollen glands.
- Large, raised gray/white lesions in mouth, underarm, or groin area.
- Fever.
- Hair loss in patches.
- Head and muscle aches.
- Weight loss.
- Tiredness.

If not treated in this stage, signs will still go away. However, the syphilis bacteria are still in the body. The infection will progress into the latent stage.

3. Latent Stage: This stage is also called the hidden stage. It can last many years. Syphilis remains in the body with no signs of infection. Without treatment, syphilis can pass to the Late Stage. This can take 10 to 20 years.

4. Late Stage: Syphilis in this stage can cause:

- Numbness.
- Problems with blood vessels.
- Damage to bones and joints.
- Difficulty walking.
- Blindness.
- Paralysis.
- Brain damage.
- Dementia.
- Heart disease.
- Death.



Syphilis Bacterium

How do you know if you have syphilis?

Your health care provider (HCP) can examine and test you for syphilis. Blood or fluid from a sore can be tested.

How is it treated?

Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics in all stages of the disease. Always finish treatment. Do not have sex until after treatment and signs of it are gone. See your HCP if your signs do not go away after treatment. Some damage to your body caused by the disease may remain.

If you have syphilis:

- ▶ Always finish all antibiotic treatment.
- ▶ Do not have sex with someone who has syphilis or has not finished treatment (to prevent re-infection).
- ▶ Tell current and recent sex partners of the infection so they can get checked.
- ▶ Know that it can raise the risk of getting and spreading HIV.
- ▶ Get tested again after 6 and 12 months. Only a HCP can tell you when you no longer have it.

How can you avoid syphilis?

- ▶ Avoid sexual contact.
- ▶ Have safer sex:
 - Reduce the number of sexual partners.
 - Condoms, when used correctly, can reduce the risk of getting syphilis. Each time you have sex use a condom (male or female type):
 - During vaginal sex.
 - During anal sex.
 - During oral sex.
 - Have sex with only one partner who does not have sex with others and does not have syphilis.
- ▶ Know that other forms of birth control do not protect against syphilis.



For more information, see *Safer Sex* on page 71

Learn more:

Veterans Health Library:

Syphilis

http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/Encyclopedia/142,85083_VA

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Syphilis - CDC Fact Sheet

www.cdc.gov/std/Syphilis/STDFact-syphilis.htm

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID/NIH):

Syphilis

www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/syphilis/Pages/default.aspx

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health:

Men's Health: Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/mens-health/sexual-health-for-men/sexually-transmitted-infections.html>