



Syphilis

FACT SHEET

Syphilis...

- ...is transmitted by hand, oral, or genital contact with the sore or rash of an infected person.
- ...will cause a painless sore and/or rash when first infected.
- ...may not be noticed if the sore or rash is in an area that is not easy to see.
- ...is only cured if treated, even though the sore and the rashes will go away on their own.
- ...can be cured with antibiotics, but a person can get it again if he or she has sex with an infected person.



What is it?

- Syphilis is caused by bacteria.
- It has been called syph, the pox, lues (LOO-eez), or bad blood.
- Syphilis can spread and cause damage to other parts of the body.

How is it transmitted?

- Syphilis is usually transmitted by having vaginal, oral, or anal sex with an infected person.
- It can also be transmitted by skin contact with open sores or rashes.
- An infected mother can pass it to her baby during pregnancy or childbirth.

What are symptoms of infection?

- All infected persons have external symptoms in two stages. People may not see the early symptoms.
- In the first stage of infection, syphilis causes a painless sore called a chancre (SHANK-er). The chancre may be on the penis, scrotum, vagina, labia, mouth, throat, breasts, anus, or fingers. The sore goes away in a few weeks, but the person is still infected. Lymph glands in the groin or neck may be swollen.
- In the second stage, the person may get fever, aches, sore throat, and swollen glands. There also may be a rash or hair loss. The rash may or may not be painless. These symptoms can be mistaken for something else and then forgotten as visible symptoms will go away, even without treatment. These symptoms go away after a few weeks, but the person is still infected.
- In the third stage, the person will not experience external symptoms, but will have internal damage. The person may suffer damage to the eyes, heart, brain, and spinal cord, such as blindness, heart disease, brain damage, and death.

What are other consequences of infection?

- A variety of symptoms appear and disappear, causing more and more damage to vital organs, if syphilis is not treated.
- If an infected woman passes it to her baby during pregnancy, it can cause a miscarriage or still birth. It can cause damage to babies' eyes, skin, teeth, liver, and bones.

How is it diagnosed?

- Local health departments, school-based health clinics, and other doctor's offices may offer confidential, free or low-cost testing and treatment for syphilis for young people.
- The only way a person can be sure if he or she has syphilis is to have a blood test for syphilis.

Is there a treatment? A cure?

- Syphilis can be cured with antibiotic shots prescribed by a doctor. However, any damage already done cannot be reversed.
- In later stages of infection, additional treatment may be needed.
- The sex partner of an infected person must also be treated. If not, they will give it to each other again if they have sex.
- A person is not immune from syphilis after having it and being cured. A person can get it again.

How can it be avoided?

- Abstain from vaginal, oral, and anal sex.
- Avoid sexual contact where the genitals or hand of one person come in contact with the sore or rash-covered skin of another person.