

Syphilis Fact Sheet

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What is Syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacteria that can cause very serious health problems when left untreated.

How is Syphilis Spread?

Syphilis can be spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with a syphilis sore. Usually this involves vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Syphilis sores can be located on the penis, vagina, and anus, or on the lips and/or inside the mouth. Syphilis can be spread during the infection's primary, secondary, and early latent stages. Syphilis can also be spread from an infected mother to her unborn baby.

The Symptoms of Syphilis

Syphilis can be divided into multiple stages with different signs and symptoms associated with the stages.

Primary Stage

- Single or Multiple Sores; this is where syphilis enters the body
- Sores can be firm, round, and painless
- Usually and easily unnoticeable
- Sores last 3-6 weeks and will heal regardless if treated

Secondary Stage

- Skin rashes and/or sores in mouth, vagina, or anus
- Rash can look rough, red, or reddish brown spots on palms of hands and/or heels of feet
- Rash usually will not itch and will not be noticed
- Other Symptoms: fever, swollen lymph nodes, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscles aches, and fatigue

Latent and Late Stage

- Without treatment a person can carrier syphilis within their bodies for years without symptoms
- The late stage of syphilis will occur 10-30 years later
- Symptoms of Late Year: difficulty coordinating muscle movement, paralysis, numbness, blindness, and dementia
- The Late Stage can also cause internal organ damage which can result in death

A syphilis infection is called an "early case" if a patient has been infected for a year or less, such as during the primary or secondary stages of syphilis. People who have early syphilis infections can more easily spread the infection to their sex partners.

Syphilis Treatment

In the early stages, syphilis is easy to cure. The preferred treatment is penicillin, an antibiotic injection medication. If you are allergic to penicillin, your healthcare provider will suggest another antibiotic. However, treatment will not undo any damage that the infection has already caused.

It is important to avoid sexual contact until treatment is complete and blood tests indicate the infection has been cured.

You can be re-infected again. Syphilis sores can be hidden in the vagina, anus, under the foreskin of the penis, or in the mouth, it may not be obvious that a sex partner has syphilis. Unless you know that your sex partner(s) has been tested and treated, you may be at risk of getting syphilis again from an untreated sex partner. Remember, condoms reduce the risk of getting STIs, but will not get rid of the risk completely.

Without treatment, syphilis can spread to the brain and nervous system, internal organs, or the eyes, even causing blindness. Syphilis is serious and should be treated as soon as it is diagnosed.

I am pregnant. How does syphilis affect my unborn child?

If you are pregnant and have syphilis, you can give the infection to your unborn baby, which is called congenital syphilis. Having syphilis can lead to a low birth weight baby. It can also make it more likely you will deliver your baby too early or stillborn (a baby born dead). To protect your baby, you should be tested for syphilis at least once during your pregnancy. Receive immediate treatment if you test positive.

An infected baby may be born without signs or symptoms of disease. However, if not treated immediately, the baby may develop serious problems within a few weeks. Untreated babies can have health problems such as cataracts, deafness, seizures, and can die.

More Information: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-syphilis.htm>



LENAWEE COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

1040 S. Winter St. Suite 2328
Adrian, MI 49221
Phone: (517) 264-5238
Fax: (517) 264-0790
www.lenawehealthdepartment.org