
Sexually Transmitted Diseases :

Syphilis (sif-i-lis)

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

What is it ?

Syphilis is a serious disease. It is spread by genital, anal or oral sex with an infected person. The first sign is a painless sore (ulcer) where the germ entered the body. The second stage is a body rash, which comes weeks later. Syphilis affects the whole body.

How did I get it ?

By direct contact, usually sexual, with the sores, rashes or body fluids (semen, blood, vaginal secretions) of infected people.

What can it do to me ?

Syphilis symptoms go away in 6 months even with no treatment, but the germs are still spreading in your body. Years later syphilis enters its third stage. This may cause heart disease, brain damage or death. Early treatment can protect against this.

People with genital sores may have a greater chance of getting HIV infection. If you have HIV infection, the second and third stage of syphilis may come sooner and be more serious.

How is it treated ?

With antibiotics, usually penicillin. If you are treated with penicillin you may be given one or more injections a week apart. It is important to go each week for your injection until treatment is finished.

Does the treatment work ?

Generally. To be certain, your doctor or clinic may do more tests over the next 2 years.

Could I give it to other people ?

Yes, mainly to your sex partner(s). Without treatment, you are infectious (able to pass syphilis to others) for the first 2 years after getting the disease. Many people who have syphilis do not notice any problems. Tell your sex partner(s) from at least the past 2 years. The length of time depends on how long you have had the disease. They may have it and not know it. Your public health nurse will contact your partner(s) if you prefer. Your name will be kept confidential.

Pregnant women with syphilis can give the disease to their unborn children. Syphilis may cause birth defects. Doctors/clinics usually do a syphilis test at the first visit of every pregnant woman.

When can I have sex again ?

When you and your partner(s) have finished treatment, and the doctor or clinic says you can no longer infect others.

Is follow-up important ?

Yes. It is important that you return for a check-up to be sure your disease has been cured.

Remember:

- Finish the treatment your doctor or clinic prescribes;
- Avoid alcohol while taking antibiotics;
- Return for follow-up blood tests as your doctor or clinic asks;
- People you have had sex with during the past 2 years should be examined and treated;
- Use condoms to lower the chance of infections in future.

If you are worried or have more questions, call your local health unit or STD clinic.

Government of Ontario

For information about health services and resources :

www.health.gov.on.ca

For consumer-friendly health tips and information :

www.HealthyOntario.com

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343;

TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Telehealth Ontario:

1-866-797-0000; TTY 1-866-797-0007

INFOline is open during business hours and can provide general information on healthcare.

Telehealth Ontario is a 24/7 service which uses nurse practitioners to answer your immediate health concerns.