

Syphilis

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacteria (*Treponema pallidum*). The infection progresses in stages.

How do I get syphilis?

Syphilis is passed between people through unprotected sexual contact (oral, vaginal, or anal sex without a condom). You can spread it to others without knowing it.

Pregnant females can pass the infection on to their unborn children.

How can I prevent syphilis?

When you're sexually active, the best way to prevent syphilis is to use condoms for oral, vaginal, and anal sex.

Don't have any sexual contact if you or your partner(s) have symptoms of an STI, or may have been exposed to an STI. See a doctor or go to an STI Clinic for testing.

Get STI Testing every 3 to 6 months and when you have symptoms.

How do I know I have syphilis?

Many people with syphilis have no symptoms, while others may have:

- sores on or near the penis or in and around the vagina, mouth, or rectum
- a rash on the palms of the hands, feet, or the whole body

The sores and rash may not be painful.

The best way to find out if you have syphilis is to get tested. Your nurse or doctor will do a blood test and test you for other STIs.

Is syphilis harmful?

If not treated, syphilis may cause blindness, paralysis, deafness, brain and heart disease, and mental health problems. These effects can be prevented if you get **early STI testing and treatment**.

What if I'm pregnant?

If not treated, syphilis can cause **pregnancy problems** like early delivery, rupture of membranes, low birth weight, and stillbirth.

Syphilis can also cause birth defects that can lead to long-term health problems. When a female is treated **before** delivering her baby, these problems can be prevented.

How is syphilis treated?

Syphilis is treated with antibiotics. Your partner(s) also needs to be tested and treated, even if there are no symptoms. You can get re-infected if you have unprotected sex with someone before he or she is treated.

Your blood test for syphilis will likely stay positive, even if you've been properly treated. But, you can be re-infected if you're exposed again.

When can I have sex again?

It will take 1 week for the antibiotic to get rid of the infection. Don't have unprotected sex (oral, vaginal, or anal sex without a condom) for **7 days** after you and your partner(s) have been treated. The best protection is **not** to have sex (oral, vaginal, or anal) for at least 7 days.

If you still have symptoms, don't have any sexual contact.

For More Information

- STI/HIV Information Line: 1-800-772-2437
- www.myhealth.alberta.ca
- www.sexgerms.com



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