

Syphilis Fact Sheet

What is Syphilis?

Syphilis is a serious sexually transmitted infection (STI) that is caused by a bacterium called *Treponema pallidum*. Syphilis typically infects the genital area but may also cause sores on the lips and in the mouth. Going without treatment may cause long term health problems and even death.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Syphilis signs and symptoms can be categorized into three stages.

Primary Stage:

- Development of Chancre sores (round, hard, painless bumps) located where infection entered the body; lasts about 3 to 6 weeks and heals regardless of treatment.
- Without treatment, infection progresses to second stage.

Secondary Stage:

- Skin rashes: normally rough and red/reddish brown on palms of hands and/or bottoms of feet but can be any kind; does not itch.
- Skin sores can be found on the mouth, vagina, or anus.
- Raised lesions, that are white/grey in color occur in patches near moist areas, such as the underarm or groin.
- Other symptoms may include fever, swollen lymph glands, hair loss, weight loss, muscle aches, and fatigue.
- Symptoms may resolve on their own, but without treatment, the infection progresses into the latent stage.

Latent and Late Stage:

- This stage is known as the hidden stage because within this time, all symptoms have disappeared.
- In the late stage, the infection damages all internal organs, which results in poor muscle coordination, paralysis, numbness, gradual blindness, dementia, and sometimes death.

How does it spread?

Syphilis spreads from person to person through direct contact with a syphilis sore, called a chancre, that occurs during vaginal, anal, or oral sex with an infected person. These chancres can be found on the genitals, on the anus, in the rectum, on the lips, and in the mouth. A pregnant woman with syphilis can infect their baby.

How is it treated?

Syphilis can be treated and cured by antibiotics however these antibiotics cannot reverse any damage that has already been done by the infection. During treatment, sex should be avoided until all sores are healed.

Prevention:

- Avoid unprotected sexual activities that may put you at risk.
- Use a condom correctly every time you have vaginal or anal sex and use a dental dam during oral sex.

For more information:

Visit the CDC here: [Syphilis - CDC Resource](#)



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