

# What you should know about Syphilis

## What is syphilis?

**Syphilis** is a very serious STD (sexually transmitted disease). It is caused by a germ you can get from any sexual contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus of a person who has the disease. A pregnant woman can pass it to her unborn child.

## Many people do not know they have syphilis.

Many people with syphilis look and feel healthy. But you can still pass the disease to others even if you don't have symptoms. Too many people don't realize they have it until they have severe health problems.

## Syphilis can be deadly!

Syphilis can be very harmful for both women and men if it isn't treated early.

## What are the symptoms of syphilis?

Syphilis often begins as a sore, called a chancre ("shank-er"), where the germ has entered the body. This sore mostly occurs on or near the sex organs, but it can also occur around the mouth or anus. The sore does not hurt and it goes away without treatment after a few weeks, **but you still have the disease.**

Later, there may be other symptoms, such as:

- Rashes on the palms of the hands and bottoms of the feet
- Hair loss
- Headaches, fever and sore throat
- Aches in the bones
- Swollen joints

These symptoms will also go away without treatment, but you still have the disease. If left untreated over a period of years, the disease can cause:

- Arthritis
- Blindness
- Heart disease
- Mental illness
- Death

## How would you know if you have syphilis?

The only way to be sure is to get tested at your doctor's office or an STD clinic. A simple blood test can tell if you have the disease.

## What about syphilis and pregnancy?

All pregnant women should be tested for syphilis at their first prenatal visit and at delivery. A pregnant woman who doesn't get treatment, may have a stillbirth (baby born dead) or have a baby born with severe physical and mental health problems.

