

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SYPHILIS

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Visit knowmystatus.org or call 2-1-1 to find a clinic in your area to get tested. Many public health clinics provide STD testing and treatment for little or no cost. Your name and health records are kept private.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of State
Health Services

For HIV/STD questions, call
800-CDC-INFO (English/Español)
888-232-6348 (TTY) or 7-1-1

Visit: dshs.texas.gov/hivstd

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WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can cause serious long-term damage to the body when left untreated. Sexual contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus of a person with syphilis can transmit it. While antibiotics can cure syphilis, they cannot repair damage caused by the infection.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SYPHILIS?

The first symptom of a syphilis infection is a sore on the body. These sores mostly occur on or near the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus. The sores typically do not hurt and will go away in a few weeks without treatment. However, syphilis sores can still transmit the disease.

In later stages of syphilis, other symptoms include:

- Rough red rashes on the palms of the hands and bottoms of the feet, chest, back, or around the genitals or anus
- Hair loss
- Headaches, fever, and sore throat

These symptoms can also go away without treatment, but the person still has syphilis. If left untreated, the infection can cause serious health problems like arthritis, heart disease, nervous system problems, dementia, blindness, and even death.

SHOULD I GET A SYPHILIS TEST?

You should get tested if you or your sexual partner(s) have syphilis symptoms. If you think you have syphilis, go to your healthcare provider's office or an STD clinic for a blood test.

You can have syphilis even if you do not have symptoms, so make sure to get tested regularly if you have sex without condoms.

If you test positive for syphilis, follow the healthcare provider's advice about treatment. Tell your sexual partner(s) to get tested as well.

If you do not want to tell your partner(s) about your diagnosis, please contact your local health department by calling 2-1-1.

HOW DOES SYPHILIS AFFECT PREGNANCY?

If left untreated, or she does not finish treatment, a pregnant woman can pass syphilis to her unborn child. This condition is called *congenital syphilis*. Congenital syphilis can cause premature birth, serious disabilities, brain or nerve damage, or stillbirth. Texas law requires clinicians to test all pregnant women at their first prenatal visit, in the third trimester, and again at delivery. A pregnant woman who tests positive for syphilis should receive treatment immediately.

WHAT ABOUT SYPHILIS AND HIV?

You are at higher risk for contracting HIV if you have syphilis. Syphilis sores can provide an entry point for HIV and other STDs.

When you get tested for syphilis, ask your healthcare provider for a full STD panel.

HOW DO I PREVENT SYPHILIS?

The only sure way to avoid syphilis and other STDs is to not have sex. Vaginal, oral, and anal sex can pass syphilis and other STDs.

If you do have sex, use a condom every time. When used correctly, condoms can stop the spread of syphilis by preventing contact with the sore. Be aware that syphilis sores can occur outside the area covered by a condom.

Staying with one partner who only has sex with you can also help prevent STDs. Use condoms unless tests show you and your partner do not have any STDs.