

## TESTING

The only way to know if you have syphilis is by getting tested.

Syphilis can be picked up in a simple blood test, or if you have a sore, lesion, or ulcer that can be swabbed. Testing is recommended every **3-6 months** if you have multiple sexual partners. For monogamous relationships, testing is still recommended **once a year**.

Syphilis has a testing window period and can take **up-to 6 weeks** to show up on a blood test from when someone is first exposed to it.

## SYPHILIS AND HIV

If you are living with HIV and on treatment, syphilis symptoms may progress at a faster rate, so it is important to get tested regularly.

Having syphilis can also increase someone's risk of acquiring HIV, particularly in the early stages of the infection.

## STAY PROTECTED!

While Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is great for preventing HIV, it does nothing to prevent other STIs. If you want to reduce your risk of contracting syphilis, make sure to use a condom!



# SYPHILIS

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

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## WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is a sexually transmissible infection (STI). It is curable but can lead to serious complications if left untreated.

Syphilis is usually passed on during oral, anal, or vaginal sex. The infection is transmitted when there is skin-to-skin contact with an infected area (such as sores, lesions or ulcers).

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Syphilis is known as the “great pretender” because its symptoms are often mistaken for other conditions, such as a skin rash.

Common symptoms of syphilis include:

- Small sores or ulcer like lesions near the genitals, anus, or mouth
- Small sores or ulcer like lesions around other parts of the body
- A non-itchy rash on the hands, feet, or body
- Patchy hair loss, and
- Fever, headache and generally feeling unwell

Symptoms often go away after a period of time even without treatment, however, the syphilis bacteria will continue to stay active in your system causing damage and leading to significant health issues later.

Not everyone has symptoms, which means people often don't realise they have the infection. **The only way to know is to test.**

## TREATMENT

Treatment varies depending on the stage of the infection and symptoms. Treatment involves an injection of antibiotics, or a course of oral antibiotics (if you can't have the injection due to a penicillin allergy).

Usually only one injection is needed but this may vary depending on the stage of the infection.

Follow up blood tests are required after treatment to confirm that treatment has worked.

## PREVENTING SYPHILIS

To help prevent catching or spreading syphilis:

- See a healthcare provider if you notice any sores or rashes in or around your mouth, genitals or other parts of the body
- Use barrier methods for all types of sex
- Get tested as part of your routine check up
- Include syphilis in your regular STI testing
- Talk about sexual health and safer sex
- Get tested for syphilis if you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant.

## SYPHILIS AND PREGNANCY

Untreated syphilis during pregnancy can be harmful. When syphilis passes from a pregnant person to the foetus, this is what's known as **congenital syphilis**.

Congenital syphilis infection is a very serious health matter and can result in miscarriage, preterm birth, low birth weight, stillbirth, or death soon after birth.

All pregnant people should be tested for syphilis as part of routine care throughout a pregnancy.

## SYPHILIS CLOSE UP

Syphilis is caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*. Once the bacteria has entered the body, it can produce painless sores around the infected areas. These are called chancres.

