



# SYPHILIS 101

Syphilis can be a deadly sexually transmitted disease (STD) if not treated. But if caught early it is completely curable.

## THE FACTS

Syphilis is a bacterial infection that can be passed on during unprotected vaginal, oral, and anal sex. It can also be passed from a mother to her child. People who have syphilis may show no symptoms, which is why it is possible to spread the infection without knowing it.

The good news is that, if caught early, syphilis can be easily treated with antibiotics. But if someone with syphilis doesn't get treated, it can cause serious health consequences, including permanent damage to their internal organs. That's why it's so important to get tested, learn your status, and get treated early if you discover you have it.

## SYMPTOMS OF SYPHILIS

It is common to describe the symptoms of syphilis in three stages: primary, secondary, and late stages of infection.

**Primary Stage** - Most people experience few symptoms when they are initially infected with syphilis, but you might see a sore (or many sores) called a chancre if you do notice something. This sore usually lasts 3-6 weeks and will heal without treatment. The sore is often not painful. Although the sore heals, the person is still infected with syphilis and will progress to the next stage of infection.

## SYPHILIS TREATMENT

Fortunately, the early stages of syphilis can be easily treated with antibiotics. But the later stages of syphilis can be more challenging to treat. That's one reason it's crucial that you and all of your partners get tested and treated early on if you are infected. People with syphilis should not have sex until their sex partners - finish any treatment prescribed by their health care professional and only after their sores are completely healed.

## POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS

**Secondary Stage**- A skin rash will appear (often on the palms of the hands and the bottoms of the feet), at times followed by sores in the mouth, vagina, anus, or other mucous membranes. Some people also experience fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches, and fatigue. If left untreated, some of these symptoms may go away.

**Late Stage**- In the late stage of syphilis, the bacteria damages peoples' internal organs, like the brain, heart, liver, and bones.

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE SYPHILIS?

The only way to know if you have syphilis is to get tested. Getting tested is easy. To test you for syphilis, your healthcare provider will collect a blood sample or a swab sample of the chancre tissue. These tests should not hurt, but tell your provider if you experience any discomfort.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

### Get Educated

*For vaginal and anal sex:* Learn how to use latex condoms the right way and use them every time. They're the only way to prevent STDs during vaginal and anal sex.

*For oral sex:* Use condoms for oral sex on a penis and dental dams for oral sex on a vagina or anus.

*For fingering, hand jobs, and other intimate touching:* Wash your hands with soap and water after touching your partner's genitals before touching your own (and vice versa). To be extra safe, some people choose to use latex gloves. Find what works for you.

### Get Tested

Getting tested with your partner and treating any infection will keep you safe from the negative consequences of gonorrhea.

### Be Smart

Have sex with only one partner, who has been tested and is not infected, and who is only having sex with you.

### Stay Clear

Avoid drinking alcohol and doing drugs before you have sex. It isn't easy to make good decisions when under the influence.

## WHAT DOESN'T WORK

- "Pulling out" before a man ejaculates into the vagina or anus
- Birth control (it only reduces the risk of pregnancy)
- Washing your genitals, peeing, or douching after sex

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional information about gonorrhea visit:

- [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)
- [itsyoursexlife.com/gyt/know](http://itsyoursexlife.com/gyt/know)
- [www.weRnative.org](http://www.weRnative.org)
- [www.gbtchb.org](http://www.gbtchb.org)

