

## Patient Information about Syphilis

<http://www.urologychannel.com/patient-information-std/syphilis.shtml>

Syphilis is a highly contagious sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can cause severe complications and may be fatal if left untreated. Syphilis is caused by bacteria and is spread through contact with sores or lesions. Without antibiotic treatment, this sexually transmitted infection (STI) progresses through 4 stages. Each of these stages can last for weeks to years. Complications caused by late-stage syphilis infection (e.g., brain damage, heart damage) are irreversible.

Signs and symptoms of early (primary) syphilis include a painless sore that usually develops on the penis or anus in men and on the vulva, perineum, or vagina in women. The bacteria then spread through the body causing rash, lesions, joint pain, fever, swollen lymph nodes, and other symptoms associated with secondary syphilis. Syphilis symptoms resolve during the third stage (also called the latent or hidden stage), but the infection remains and without treatment may proceed to late-stage syphilis. Late-stage syphilis causes severe organ damage.

Here are some questions to ask your doctor (e.g., urologist, gynecologist) about syphilis. **Print this page**, check off the questions you would like answered, and bring it to your doctor's appointment. Information about how to prevent this serious STD can help reduce the risk for devastating complications.

### Questions to Ask Your Doctor about Syphilis

- Why do you suspect that I have syphilis?
- How is syphilis transmitted?
- How will you determine if I have syphilis or another type of sexually transmitted infection (STI) or medical condition? What types of diagnostic tests will be performed?
- How long will it take to get the results of my STD testing?
- Should I call for the test results or will someone contact me?  
**Telephone number to call:**                      **Date to call:**
- Should my past or current sexual partners undergo STD testing?
- My symptoms have resolved. Should I still be tested for STDs?
- What stage is my disease? Do I have primary syphilis, secondary syphilis, latent syphilis, or late-stage (tertiary) syphilis?
- Does syphilis infection increase my risk for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs),

such as HIV/AIDS, and other health problems?

- If my sexual partner tests negative for syphilis, how can I reduce the risk of infecting him/her?
- What does safer sex involve?
- Is syphilis treatable? Is it curable?
- What types of treatment for syphilis are available?
- What treatment do you recommend?
- Why do you recommend this treatment?
- How will this treatment be administered? How long will the course of treatment last?
- What are the benefits, risks, and possible side effects associated with this syphilis treatment?
- What should I do if I experience severe side effects?  
**Telephone number to call:**
- Are there ways that I can help myself feel better during treatment or improve the effectiveness of my treatment?
- How will we know if my condition has been treated successfully? Will I undergo additional STD testing?
- If this treatment is unsuccessful, what other medications are available?
- What are the long-term risks and complications related to syphilis?
- What risks are associated with pregnancy and syphilis infection?
- How can these risks and complications be prevented?
- If complications develop, can they be treated?

- What does treatment for newborns involve?
- What types of precautions can I take to protect myself and my sexual partner(s)?
- What kinds of sexual activity increase the risk for STDs?
- Are newer treatment options for people who have syphilis being studied? What are these experimental treatments and when might they become available?
- Can you recommend a local or online support group for people who have syphilis and their sexual partners?
- Can you recommend resources for more information about syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections?

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**Notes/Additional Information**