



# **SYPHILIS**

## **What is syphilis?**

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacteria called *Treponema pallidum*. A syphilis infection has three stages with different symptoms connected to each stage. It is common that an infected person will not notice any symptoms. When syphilis is in the body for a long time without any medication, it can lead to serious health problems.

## **How is syphilis passed?**

- Through direct sexual contact (oral, genital, anal) or contact with a contagious lesion or rash
- To an infant through pregnancy or delivery
- Rarely transmitted through shared drug equipment

## **What does syphilis look like?**

### **Primary Stage:**

- Appearance of a sore or sores in or around the mouth, genitals and/or anus

### **Secondary Stage:**

- A rash on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet or the entire body
- Swollen and/or enlarged glands that may last one to six weeks before going away on their own
- Flu-like symptoms (headache, muscle and joint pain, loss of appetite, fever)
- Patchy hair loss

### **Latent Stage:**

- During this stage, there may not be any signs or symptoms, but the infection can still be passed on to a partner

### **Tertiary Stage:**

If syphilis is not treated it may cause serious health problems to someone's heart, brain, liver, bones and eyes.

## **How do I get tested?**

A blood test is used to test for syphilis 4-6 weeks after having sex or close physical contact with a partner.

## **What happens if I have a positive test result?**

- You will be connected to a public health nurse who will provide you with resources, counselling, support, and information.
- Syphilis is treated with antibiotics.

- Your partner(s) should be tested and treated before you have any sexual activity.
- Once you have been treated for syphilis, you will need to go for blood tests to make sure the medication worked.
- Even though a person is treated and cured, some of the blood tests for syphilis may remain positive for life.
- When seeing a new health care provider, it is important to let them know if you have had treatment for syphilis.

### **How do I practice safer sex?**

- Use an internal or external condom, every time you have vaginal and/or anal sex
- Use an external condom or dental dam every time you have oral sex
- Use water-based or silicone-based lubricants
- If you share sex toys, cover the toy with a condom and clean after each use
- Get tested for STIs regularly

### **For more information:**

- PEP, PrEP, HIV/STI: <http://thesexyouwant.ca/>
- STI testing, birth control: [www.sexandu.ca](http://www.sexandu.ca)

### **Sexual Health Clinic**

179 Clarence St,  
Ottawa. ON K1N5P7  
613-234-4641 | TTY: 613-580-9656  
[Ottawapublichealth.ca](http://Ottawapublichealth.ca)

### **GayZone Clinic**

420 Cooper St. Ottawa, ON  
[www.gayzonegaie.ca](http://www.gayzonegaie.ca)