



District Health Department #10
Family Planning

Syphilis

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by bacteria. Syphilis can be spread through blood, semen, vaginal fluids, open sores, and from skin to skin contact. It can occur in both men and women.



What are the symptoms of Syphilis?

Many people with Syphilis do not show symptoms for several years, however, they are still at risk for transmitting the disease. Syphilis occurs in three stages:

Primary stage— this stage is marked by the appearance of a sore. This sore is usually firm, round, small and painless. The sore generally lasts for 3-6 weeks and goes away without treatment. This does not mean the Syphilis is cured. If treatment was not given the Syphilis moves on to the next stage.

Secondary stage— this stage begins with a skin rash on one or more areas of the body. The rash typically causes rough, reddish brown bumps on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet. In addition to rashes, symptoms may include fever, sore throat, headaches, hair loss, weight loss and fatigue. Secondary symptoms will often disappear on their own but again if treatment was not given the syphilis will continue to get worse.

Late stage— during this stage there are no noticeable symptoms even though the Syphilis still remains in the body. If left untreated, Syphilis will begin to damage the internal organs. Problems with the brain, nerves, heart, liver, bones, hearing abnormalities and mouth sores may all occur. Signs of late stage Syphilis may be paralysis, numbness, gradual blindness and dementia.

Is Syphilis treatable?

Syphilis is able to be treated through the use of antibiotics. One injection of the antibiotic is generally enough to treat early stage Syphilis but multiple doses may be needed if it has progressed to a later stage. Persons who receive treatment should have no sexual contact until all sores have healed and should notify their partner so they can be tested.



How can I prevent Syphilis?

The only 100% sure way to prevent getting any STD, including Syphilis, is to abstain from having sexual intercourse. Use of a latex condom can reduce the risk of getting Syphilis but only if the infected area is covered. Sores may be present on areas outside of and surrounding the genitalia.

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For more information please visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website, <http://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/default.htm>