



SYPHILIS

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacteria called *Treponema pallidum*. A syphilis infection has four stages with different symptoms connected to each stage. It is common that an infected person will not notice any symptoms but 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 during pregnancy or delivery
- Rarely transmitted through sharing 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 has not been 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.

What happens if I have a positive test result?

- You will be contacted by 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 STBIs regularly

For more information:

- PEP, PrEP, HIV/STI: www.thesexyouwant.ca
- STI testing, birth control: www.sexandu.ca

Call the **Sexual Health Infoline Ontario** at 1-800-668-2437 if you have questions or need help.

Sexual Health Clinic

179 Clarence St,
Ottawa. ON K1N5P7
613-234-4641 | TTY: 613-580-9656
OttawaPublicHealth.ca

GayZone Clinic

420 Cooper St. Ottawa, ON
www.gayzonegaie.ca