

# Syphilis

## Description

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease. It is caused by bacteria and can lead to serious health problems if left untreated. Syphilis is spread through direct contact with a person who has a syphilis sore. These sores normally occur in or on the mouth, genitals or anus.

## Symptoms

There are several stages of syphilis infection, all with different symptoms.

**NOTE: MANY PEOPLE WITH SYPHILIS DO NOT SHOW ANY SYMPTOMS, BUT CAN STILL TRANSMIT THE INFECTION TO OTHERS.**

- During the primary stage there is normally a painless sore (or chancre) at the site of infection. This sore is usually firm and small, disappearing without any treatment within 3-6 weeks.
- If adequate treatment is not administered during the primary stage, the secondary stage is marked by a rash on other areas of the body beginning 4 weeks to 6 months after initial infection. The rash resembles rough, reddish-brown spots on the palms of hands and soles of feet and may last for a couple of weeks.
- Even though secondary symptoms will disappear without treatment, the syphilis infection will remain within the body. At this point (late stage), no further symptoms may be seen for years; although the infected individual is still contagious. In late state syphilis there may be damage to internal organs such as the brain, eyes and heart. It may be serious enough to result in death.

## Diagnosis

Syphilis can be diagnosed with a blood test. It is important to discuss your sexual history and current sexual practices with your health care provider so that he/she may examine and test you for STDs, including syphilis.

## Treatment

Syphilis is easy to treat in the early stages with antibiotics. However, you can still become re-infected with the bacteria after taking antibiotics. Individuals receiving treatment for syphilis sores should abstain from sexual activity until the sores have healed completely.

## Prevention

Abstaining from oral, anal, and vaginal intercourse is the only way to ensure complete protection. If you choose to be sexually active, it is important to use condoms with every sex act. Even though condoms do not provide 100% protection against syphilis, they can reduce your risk of transmission.

## How common is it?

In California, syphilis is most common among men who have sex with men and in the African American community. Although rates have decreased due to routine screening of pregnant mothers and the widespread availability of antibiotics, it is still a commonly reported disease.

## For More Information:

Student Health Services . . . . .	.619-594-5281	Facebook/Twitter. . . . .	.Facebook.com/aztehealth &
Health Promotion. . . . .	.619-594-4133		@AZTEChealth
Visit Our Website at . . . . .	shs.sdsu.edu	American Social Health Association (ASHA)	
		National STD Hotline. . . . .	.800-227-8922