

Syphilis – patient information

Why am I receiving this information?

You have been, or are suspected of being, infected with syphilis. This leaflet contains information about syphilis, how it is treated and what you need to do.

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a disease caused by a bacterium. The syphilis bacterium can cause infections in the mucus membranes or on the skin on and around the genitals, anus or mouth. The bacterium can also be found in the blood. Syphilis can be present in the body for several years without giving any symptoms.

Will I notice if I have syphilis?

Many people who are infected have no symptoms.

Some develop sores on, in or near the genitals, anus or mouth. These sores usually heal after a few weeks. More people develop skin rashes, often even on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet.

Is syphilis dangerous?

Left untreated, syphilis can cause serious damage to various organs.

How is syphilis transmitted?

Syphilis is transmitted primarily through unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex. If you are pregnant, there is a risk of your baby becoming infected during your pregnancy. All pregnant women are offered syphilis testing early in pregnancy.

Even if a person exhibits no symptoms, syphilis is contagious. Left untreated, syphilis is transmitted during sex throughout the first year after the initial infection. The infection can be spread by blood and to an unborn baby more than a year after the initial infection.

You do not develop immunity to syphilis and, as such, you can get syphilis multiple times.

Syphilis is **not** transmitted through clothing, towels or toilets.

How is syphilis treated and how long am I contagious?

Syphilis is treated with antibiotics (injections or tablets). The infection clears up if you take the medicine as you are prescribed and follow the advice you are given. Treatment and healthcare appointments are provided free of charge. Your doctor will assess how long you are contagious, which is usually up until one week after your last injection of antibiotics.

If you are booked for a follow-up appointment, you must attend the clinic. In most cases, new blood samples are taken after a certain number of months to check that the infection is gone.

Can testing show whether I have had syphilis?

If blood samples are drawn to test for syphilis at a later date, it will most often show that you have had syphilis. In such cases, the laboratory will run further tests to check whether you have been infected again.

What do I need to keep in mind so as not to infect others?

Syphilis is a disease classified as a danger to public health under the Communicable Diseases Act. If you have or are suspected of having syphilis, you must follow certain rules, so-called rules of conduct.

Rules of conduct

- You must tell anyone you have sex with that you have or may have syphilis.
- You must use protection (condom) if you have sex before your treatment/testing is completed.
- If you have been given a follow-up appointment at the clinic, you must attend it.

If you have been issued rules of conduct you believe to be wrong, you can contact your county medical officer.

If you have syphilis, you must not risk infecting anyone. The safest way to do this is to not have sexual intercourse or any other type of sex until after your doctor says that you no longer have syphilis. This is usually about one week after the final injection of antibiotics. If you still have sex, you must tell your partner that you have syphilis and you must use protection (condom).

Contact tracing

It is very important that we find people with syphilis so that they can receive treatment, in part to reduce the risk of damage (see above) and in part so that the infection is not spread to more people.

The Communicable Diseases Act requires that you participate in contact tracing. This means that you must provide healthcare personnel with information about the people with whom you have had sex the past year. Sometimes, you may need to provide information about partners going back even further.

Everything you disclose is kept confidential (secret) and your identity will not be revealed to the people you name. They will only be informed that they need to get tested. Nor will the information be recorded in your medical records. Instead, it will be recorded in a special contact tracing document.

More information

You can find more information about syphilis at 1177, Youmo (for anyone aged 13 to 20 and wanting information in another language) and UMO (online youth healthcare clinic).

www.1177.se



www.youmo.se



www.umo.se



About this infection prevention sheet

This infection prevention sheet was produced by the Swedish Association of County Medical Officers and applies nationally.