



LENAWEE COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Syphilis

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What Is Syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that can cause serious health problems without treatment. Infection develops in stages (primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary). The Lenawee County Health Department can test for syphilis by drawing blood from your arm.

How is Syphilis Spread?

Syphilis can be spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with or without a sore. Usually this involves vaginal, anal, or oral sex, and syphilis sores can be located on the penis, vagina, and anus, lips and/or inside the mouth, and by blood exposure with an infected person. Syphilis can be spread during the infection's primary, secondary, and early latent stages.

The Symptoms of Syphilis

Syphilis can be divided into multiple stages with different signs and symptoms associated with the stages:

Primary Stage

- Single or multiple sores; this is where syphilis enters the body
- Sores can be firm, round, and painless
- Sores last 3-6 weeks and will heal regardless if treated

Secondary Stage

- Skin rashes and/or sores in mouth, vagina, or anus
- Rash can look like rough, red, or reddish-brown spots on palms of hands, heels of feet, and/or the torso of the body
- Rash usually will not itch and will not be noticed
- Other Symptoms: fever, swollen lymph nodes, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscles aches, and fatigue

Latent and Late Stage

- Without treatment a person can carry syphilis within their bodies for years without symptoms
- The late stage of syphilis will typically occur 10-30 years later
- Symptoms of Late Stage: difficulty coordinating muscle movement, paralysis, numbness, blindness, and dementia
- The Late Stage can also cause internal organ damage which can result in death

Minimizing the Risk

- Refrain from engaging in unprotected sex
- Communicate with partners about STI status
- Being in a long-term one-person relationship
- Always use a condom correctly
- Having one STI, especially HIV, can increase your risk for getting another STI

Syphilis Treatment

In the early stages, syphilis is easy to cure. The preferred treatment is penicillin, an antibiotic injection medication. However, treatment will not undo any damage that the infection has already caused. It is important to avoid sexual contact until treatment is complete and blood tests indicate the infection has been cured. You can be re-infected again. Syphilis sores can be hidden in the vagina, anus, under the foreskin of the penis, or in the mouth; it may not be obvious that a sex partner has syphilis.

Pregnant

If you are pregnant and have syphilis, you can give the infection to your unborn baby, which is called congenital syphilis. Having syphilis can lead to a low-birth-weight baby. It can also make it more likely you will deliver your baby too early or stillborn. To protect your baby, you should be tested for syphilis at least once during your pregnancy. Receive immediate treatment if you test positive. An infected baby may be born without signs or symptoms of disease. However, if not treated immediately, the baby may develop serious problems within a few weeks. Untreated babies can have health problems such as cataracts, deafness, seizures, and death.

This FACT SHEET is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call the Lenawee County Health Department (517) 264-5226