

# Syphilis

A curable STD caused by *Treponema pallidum*, a bacteria called a spirochete

## Signs and Symptoms

- You may not notice symptoms or may mistake symptoms for something else.
- A sore (chancre) on the genitals, mouth or rectum usually appears 1-3 weeks after exposure but can take as long as 3 months. Chancres are painless and can last for several weeks.
- A skin rash (typically rough, reddish spots on the palms of hands and bottoms of feet or on the trunk of body...usually not itchy) commonly occurs if the chancre is not treated and usually starts 5-12 weeks after infection.
- Flu-like symptoms (sore throat, swollen glands, headaches, fatigue, achy muscles)

## Transmission

- Oral, anal or vaginal sex
- Infected mother to baby during birth

## Prevention

- Abstain from oral, anal and vaginal sex.
- Use condoms/barriers consistently and correctly during oral, anal or vaginal sex.
- Maintain a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested for syphilis and is not infected.
- Get early treatment for STDs.
- Get an infected partner treated.
- Do not have sex with a partner who has syphilis until they complete treatment.

## Treatment

- See a health care provider for exam and tests to figure out the best treatment.
- Treatment includes medicines prescribed by a health care provider.
- Get a follow-up exam to make sure the treatment has worked.

## If Not Treated

- Can increase risk for getting HIV
- Damage major organs including the brain, heart and liver
- Damage blood vessels, bones, eyes and joints
- Paralysis, blindness, dementia or death
- During pregnancy:
  - Premature delivery
  - Birth defects including deafness & blindness
  - If left untreated, can lead to miscarriage or death in the newborn

## If You Have Syphilis

- Refrain from sex (oral, anal or vaginal sex) if there are symptoms.
- Seek medical care, including STD tests.
- Get tested for HIV.
- Do not have sex until you have completed treatment.
- Take all medicines prescribed, even if your symptoms are gone.
- Re-test in 1, 3, 6, 9 and 12 months.
- Make sure sex partners get treated.
- Get yearly STD screens if sexually active.

For more information about STDs  
or for getting tested and treated,  
visit our web site...

[www.kingcounty.gov/health/std](http://www.kingcounty.gov/health/std)

Public Health  
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