

# SYPHILIS

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### *What is Syphilis?*

*Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease caused by the bacterium Treponema pallidum.*

### **How is Syphilis spread?**

Syphilis is spread through direct contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus of an infected person with a syphilis sore. A person infected with syphilis is more susceptible to HIV infection.

### **How is Syphilis treated?**

In the early stages of syphilis, a single injection of penicillin is the treatment of choice. More injections may be needed for someone with the disease longer than a year. Treatment will prevent further damage, but won't repair damage that has already occurred.

### **How can we prevent Syphilis?**

Abstinence from sexual activity is the best form of protection. Latex male condoms will offer some protection. Being in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and known to be uninfected is another form of prevention.

Syphilis symptoms can be classified into 3 stages:

**Primary**--An appearance of a single sore, called a chancre, usually appearing 10-90 days after exposure, lasting 3-6 weeks. Chancre can heal without treatment. If left untreated, infection progresses to stage 2.

**Secondary**--Typically starts with the appearance of a skin rash; rough red or reddish-brown spots. The rash usually appears on the palms of hands or soles of feet, but can appear on other areas of the body. Other symptoms can include fever, swollen glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches and fatigue. These symptoms will resolve without treatment but will progress to latent or late stage of disease.

**Late**--Many years may progress without symptoms. It may cause damage to the brain, nerves, eyes, heart, blood vessels, liver, bones and joints. Late stage signs and symptoms include difficulty coordinating muscle movements, paralysis, dementia, numbness and blindness.

### **SYMPTOMS OF SYPHILIS**

Primary stage symptom:

- chancre sore

Secondary stage symptoms:

- skin rash--rough red or reddish brown spots
- fever
- swollen glands
- sore throat
- patchy hair loss
- headaches
- weight loss
- muscle aches
- fatigue

Late stage symptoms:

- difficulty coordinating muscle movement
- paralysis
- dementia
- numbness
- blindness

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