



Syphilis

What is syphilis (sifa-lis)?

Syphilis is a sexually transmissible infection (STI).

Syphilis is an infection of the vagina, penis or anus (bum).

Syphilis is very common in our community.

We need to get informed about syphilis so we can stop people in our community from getting it.

Who does syphilis affect?

In Australia most people who get syphilis are young people (men and women) aged 15-29.

Syphilis is really common in remote areas of Australia

How do you get syphilis?

You can get syphilis by having vaginal, anal or oral sex with someone who has syphilis and you don't use a condom.

You can get syphilis if you have direct contact with the rash or open sores on someone who has it.

You can catch syphilis from someone who has it even if they don't have these symptoms.

Babies can be born with syphilis if their mother has syphilis. This is called congenital syphilis.



Testing for syphilis

Testing for syphilis can be done at the clinic. A small amount of blood will be taken for testing. Sometimes if there is a sore, they may take a swab.

You can get tested for syphilis as part of your men's or women's health check – just ask.

Get tested for STIs at least every six to 12 months.

Symptoms – how would I know if I got syphilis?

Men and women can get sores around the penis, vagina or anus (bum). You can get one sore or a few.

These sores are called chancres (shankas). These sores aren't painful, so people sometimes don't notice them.

Syphilis can also cause a rash all over the body. The rash can spread to the hands and soles of the feet.

The sores and rash will go away without treatment but syphilis will still stay in the body and keep causing damage.

The only way of knowing whether you have syphilis is to get tested.

Don't be shame

Testing regularly for STIs means you're looking after your health and respecting your partners. If more people in our community test regularly for STIs, and get treated, everyone is better off.

Test results are confidential. Your partner will not be told about your result without your permission. No one else in your family or community will be told about your result without your permission.

Your confidential test results are sent to health departments so we know whether STI and BBV rates are going up or down in a community. The test results are strictly



guarded in confidential computers and locked rooms and only used to understand level of infections in a region. Health departments only let a small number of doctors or nurses use the confidential computers with STI or BBV records to keep the information safe.

Treatment for syphilis

Syphilis is easy to cure in its early stages. The sooner you get tested, the easier it is to cure.

Syphilis is treated with a single injection of penicillin (an antibiotic). This will cure syphilis if you've had it for less than a year. If you've had syphilis for longer than a year you'll need more injections.

It is important that you don't have sex until 7 days after treatment is finished and the sores are completely healed. You should also wait for your partner to finish treatment too.

Getting treated for an STI doesn't stop you picking up the same STI again. It's important to keep using condoms and to keep testing regularly for STIs – at least every six to 12 months.

What if I don't get treated?

It is very important to treat syphilis as soon as possible. Even if you have no sores or other symptoms, it continues to damage you inside.

Syphilis can damage the brain, vision, heart, veins, liver, bones, muscles and joints. After many years syphilis can cause problems with moving, paralysis, numbness, blindness and dementia (memory loss and confusion).

If you don't get treated and cured, you can pass it on to people you have sex with.

Syphilis can cause infertility – this means being unable to ever have a child.

If you have syphilis and get pregnant, your baby may be born with syphilis.

If you are pregnant it's important to test for syphilis early in the pregnancy. If you have syphilis and don't get treated your baby can get infected with syphilis in the



womb. This can cause stillbirth or serious health problems for the baby, and the baby may die.

Letting partners know they need to test

If you are diagnosed with an STI, you will need to let your sexual partners know they should get tested. This is to make sure they don't have an STI too. This is called "contact tracing".

Contact tracing is not about blame. It's just to make sure that as many people as possible who may have an STI get tested and treated.

The clinic can help you with contact tracing – but only with your permission. This is confidential – the clinic will let people you have had sex with know that it's time to have a test. The clinic will not mention your name to the people they contact.

If you prefer to do this yourself, have a look at the **Better to know** website for advice about different ways you can let people you've had sex with know that they need to have an STI test – including on how to do this anonymously - without giving your name.

Condoms can stop STIs from spreading

Here's how to use a condom:

- ⦿ Check expiry date, check the package is not damaged and open with care
- ⦿ Pinch the tip so air doesn't get trapped
- ⦿ Roll on when the penis is hard
- ⦿ Use water-based lubricant (lube). Oil based lubricant can damage the condom
- ⦿ When withdrawing, hold the base of the condom so semen (cum) doesn't spill out
- ⦿ Tie a knot in the used condom and put it in the bin. Not down the toilet as it will block the pipes.

Let's look after our sexual health and get tested for STIs. If we all test and get treated, we can stop the spread of STIs and BBVs in our community.