



# Syphilis - the basics

## What is syphilis (sifa-lis)?

Syphilis is a sexually transmissible infection (STI).

## Who does syphilis affect?

Syphilis is really common in our community – especially for young people.

## How do you get syphilis?

- You can get syphilis from having sex with someone who has syphilis and you don't use a condom. You can also get it from oral sex.
- Syphilis causes rashes and sores. But you can catch syphilis from having sex with someone who has it even if they don't have rashes or sores.
- You can get syphilis from contact with the rash or sores on someone who has it.
- Babies can be born with syphilis if their mother has syphilis.

## Testing for syphilis

- Testing can be done at the clinic. A small amount of blood will be taken for testing. Sometimes they need to take a swab.
- You can get tested for syphilis as part of your health check – just ask.
- Get tested for STIs at least every six to 12 months.
- Pregnant women should get tested for syphilis three times during pregnancy.

## Symptoms – how would I know if I got syphilis?

- Men and women can get sores around the penis, vagina or anus (bum).
- These sores are called chancres (shankas). These sores are not painful.
- The sores from syphilis can come and go.
- Syphilis can also cause a rash all over the body. The rash can spread to the hands and soles of the feet.
- Without treatment syphilis will still stay in the body and keep causing damage.
- The only way of knowing whether you have syphilis is to get tested.



### Treatment for syphilis

- Syphilis is treated with penicillin (an antibiotic) – by injection.
- The sooner you get tested for syphilis after getting it, the easier it is to cure.
- Don't have sex until 7 days after treatment is finished and the sores are gone.

### What if I don't get treated?

- It is very important to treat syphilis as soon as possible.
- Syphilis can damage the brain, eyesight, heart, veins, liver, bones, muscles and joints.
- 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 baby.
- If you have syphilis when you are pregnant, your baby may be born with syphilis. This can cause serious health problems for the baby, and the baby may die.

*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.*