



**Unneed2know**  
sexually transmitted infections

# STI Information Sheet **Syphilis**

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# STI Information Sheet

## Syphilis



### What is Syphilis?

**Syphilis is a bacterial infection that's usually caught by having sex with someone who's infected.**

It's important to get tested and treated as soon as possible if you think you might have syphilis, as it can cause serious problems if it's left untreated.

It can usually be cured with a short course of antibiotics.

You can catch syphilis more than once, even if you have been treated for it before.



### How do you get Syphilis?

**Syphilis is mainly spread through close contact with an infected sore.**

This usually happens during vaginal, anal or oral sex, or by sharing sex toys with someone who's infected. Anyone who's sexually active is potentially at risk.

It may be possible to catch syphilis if you inject yourself with drugs and you share needles with somebody who's infected, or through blood transfusions, but this is very rare in the UK as all blood donations are tested for syphilis.

Syphilis cannot be spread by using the same toilet, clothing, cutlery or bathroom as an infected person.

Pregnant women with syphilis can pass the infection to their unborn baby.

## Symptoms

The symptoms of syphilis are not always obvious and may eventually disappear, but you'll usually remain infected unless you get treated.

Some people with syphilis have no symptoms.

Symptoms can include:

- 1 | Small, painless sores or ulcers that typically appear on the penis, vagina, or around the anus, but can occur in other places such as the mouth.
- 2 | A blotchy red rash that often affects the palms of the hands or soles of the feet.
- 3 | Small skin growths (similar to genital warts) that may develop on the vulva in women or around the bottom (anus) in both men and women.
- 4 | White patches in the mouth.
- 5 | Tiredness, headaches, joint pains, a high temperature (fever) and swollen glands in your neck, groin or armpits

If it's left untreated for years, syphilis can spread to the brain or other parts of the body and cause serious long-term problems.



## Treatment

**Syphilis is usually treated with either:**

- An injection of antibiotics into your buttocks – most people will only need 1 dose, although 3 injections given at weekly intervals may be recommended if you have had syphilis for a long time.
- A course of antibiotics tablets if you cannot have the injection – this will usually last 2 or 4 weeks, depending on how long you have had syphilis.
- You should avoid any kind of sexual activity or close sexual contact with another person until at least 2 weeks after your treatment finishes.



## Preventing Syphilis

**Syphilis cannot always be prevented, but if you're sexually active you can reduce your risk by practising safer sex:**

- ✓ Use a male condom or female condom during vaginal, oral and anal sex
- ✓ Use a dental dam (a square of plastic) during oral sex
- ✓ Avoid sharing sex toys – if you do share them, wash them and cover them with a condom before each use
- ✓ These measures can also reduce your risk of catching other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- ✓ If you inject yourself with drugs, do not use other people's needles or share your needles with others.