

Syphilis

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI) which is caught through intimate contact with someone who is infected. Intimate contact includes kissing or unprotected oral, anal or vaginal sex or genital contact.

Syphilis is highly infectious

What are the signs & symptoms?

- Half of the people infected with syphilis show **no symptoms** at all. *So if you feel you may have been at risk it's best to have a check-up.*

If you do get symptoms, you might notice the following:

First stage syphilis

- **Sores** - the illness usually begins with the appearance of one or more painless but highly infectious sores. These sores can appear anywhere on the body but usually around the genitals, mouth and anus. These sores usually clear up on their own, in two to six weeks. *By this time, the bacteria will have spread to other parts of the body.*

Second stage syphilis

If the infection remains untreated the second stage usually occurs some weeks after the appearance of sores. This includes:

- A painless rash – spreading all over the body, or in patches, often including the palms of hands and sole of the feet.
- Flat warty looking growths around the anus.
- A flu-like illness, tiredness and loss of appetite, with swollen glands (this can last for weeks or months)
- White patches on the tongue and the roof of the mouth.
- Patchy hair loss
- The second stage of syphilis is very infectious and may last several weeks or months

If left untreated Syphilis can cause mental illness, blindness, heart disease or even death.

Third stage syphilis

When the infection remains untreated, it is called latent syphilis and can still be infectious.

During this stage

- There may no longer be any visible symptoms.
- This stage with no symptoms can last for a number of years.
- Syphilis will then gradually start to damage and break down vital organs in the body, including the heart, brain and nervous system.
- At this stage syphilis could be fatal.

How will I know if I have syphilis?

You won't know until you have had a syphilis test. If you or your partner think you might have an infection, you should both have a test, particularly if:

- You have had unprotected sex with a new partner
- You or your partner has had unprotected sex with other partners
- A sexual partner tells you they have an STI
- You are found to have an STI

How is syphilis diagnosed and tested?

- Syphilis is easy to diagnose and treat. Your local Genito Urinary Medicine Clinic (GUM) - The Florey Unit at Royal Berkshire Hospital can do this and can also contact, test and treat current and recent sexual partners. Details of the Florey Unit can be found on the other side of this leaflet.
- The doctor or nurse will ask you to give a blood sample and sometimes, a urine sample. They will do a genital examination as well as an examination of other parts of the body
- If you think you may have syphilis, you should also be tested for other STI which may be present without symptoms.

All stages of syphilis can be treated with antibiotics

How can I protect myself against syphilis?

- **When you have sex, you can reduce your risk of syphilis and other STI by using condoms correctly and consistently during sexual intercourse or oral sex.**



Providing education, training and resources for the people of Newbury, Reading & Wokingham

Produced by the Berkshire West Sexual Health Promotion Team

www.berkshire.nhs.uk/has

Who and where is my local GUM Clinic?

**The Florey Unit
Royal Berkshire Hospital
0118 987 7202**

**Newbury Sexual Health Clinic
West Berkshire Community Hospital
London Road, Thatcham
0118 987 7216**

*A **FREE** and **CONFIDENTIAL** service that provides advice, information and treatment for people who:*

- Are worried about sexually transmitted infections
- Have other problems affecting the genital area.
- Think they may be at risk of HIV infection

When were you last tested?

Other Useful Numbers

Sexual Health & HIV Helpline
(24Hrs) 0800 567123

Sexwise Helpline
0800 282930
www.ruthinking.org.uk

NHS Direct
0845 4647

Terence Higgins Trust Helpline
0845 1221 200

Sexual Health Direct
0845 310 1334

Family Planning Clinic
0118 986 4621

Gay & Lesbian Helpline (Be You)
0118 959 7269

No. 5 Counselling Centre
0118 901 5668

It's Simple....

Syphilis is Back.

Get tested.

It's Simple....

Berkshire West Primary Care Trusts