

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SYPHILIS



## WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is a serious STD (sexually transmitted disease) that can cause long-term damage to the body when left untreated. Syphilis is caused by sexual contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus of a person who has it. Antibiotics can cure syphilis, but not the damage already caused by the infection.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SYPHILIS?

Syphilis often begins as a sore where it enters the body. The sore mostly occurs on or near the penis, vagina, mouth or anus. The sore does not hurt and goes away without treatment after a few weeks. Some people never even notice it. But the disease can still be transmitted and cause harm.

Later, other symptoms include:

- Rashes on the palms of the hands and bottoms of the feet
- Hair loss
- Headaches, fever and sore throat
- Aches in the bones
- Swollen joints

Like the sore, the symptoms go away without treatment, but the person still has syphilis. If left untreated, the disease can cause health problems like arthritis, heart disease, mental illness, blindness and even death.



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Health and Human  
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For HIV/STD questions, call  
1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Espanol)  
1-(888) 232-6348 (TTY) or 711

Visit: [www.dshs.texas.gov/hivstd](http://www.dshs.texas.gov/hivstd)

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## SHOULD YOU GET A SYPHILIS TEST?

You should get tested if you or someone you have sex with has symptoms. If you think you have syphilis, get tested at your doctor's office or an STD clinic. Simple blood tests can tell if you have the disease. You can have syphilis without symptoms, so get tested if you have sex without condoms.

If you have syphilis, follow the doctor's advice about taking medicine. Tell anyone you had sex with to get tested. The health department can help you do this if you don't want to.

## WHAT ABOUT SYPHILIS AND PREGNANCY?

A pregnant woman can give syphilis to her unborn child. Untreated syphilis can cause stillbirth (baby born dead), premature birth, and severe disabilities. Texas law requires doctors to test all pregnant women at their first prenatal visit, the third trimester, and again at delivery. A pregnant woman who tests positive for syphilis should be treated immediately.

## SYPHILIS AND HIV

A person with syphilis is at higher risk for HIV. The sore can provide an entry point for HIV and other STDs. When you get tested for syphilis, you should ask to get tested for HIV and other STDs.

## PREVENTING SYPHILIS

The only sure way to avoid syphilis and other STDs is to not have sex. Vaginal, oral, and anal sex can all pass syphilis and other STDs.

If you do have sex, use a latex condom every time. When used the right way, condoms can stop the spread of syphilis by preventing contact with the sore. Keep in mind that syphilis sores can occur outside the area covered by a condom.

Staying with one partner who only has sex with you also helps prevent STDs. Use condoms unless tests show you and your partner do not have any STDs.

## WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Visit [knowmystatus.org](https://www.knowmystatus.org) or call 2-1-1 to find a clinic in your area to get tested. Many public health clinics provide STD testing and treatment for little or no cost. Your name and health records are kept private.

