

# Syphilis

## What is Syphilis?

Syphilis is a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) that is caused by *Treponema pallidum*, a bacterium that causes an ulcer (sore) at the site of infection.

## How do you get Syphilis?

Syphilis can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone that has Syphilis. It can also be passed from a mother to her newborn baby.

## How can Syphilis be prevented?

Abstinence is the only 100% full-proof method of not contracting Syphilis or be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship. However, latex male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of Syphilis.

## What are the symptoms of Syphilis?

There are 3 stages of a Syphilis infection:

### 1<sup>st</sup> Stage:

-An ulcer (a chancre ["shan-ker"]) appears within 10 days to 3 months after exposure, but usually within 2-6 weeks.

These usually disappear within a few weeks whether treated or not.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage:

- a rash of flat, red lesions over the whole body
- rash on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet)
- broad-based papules (lumps or warts) in warm, moist sites
- mucous patches or snail-track ulcers (sores) in the mouth, appearing from 3-6 weeks after the chancre develops
- Flu-like symptoms

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage:

A minority (up to 30%) of individuals with untreated Syphilis may develop tertiary Syphilis with lesions many years after the initial infection. The lesions can cause serious disabilities such as:

- spinal cord (neurosyphilis)
- blindness
- heart disease
- mental illness
- death

## Where can I get more information?

Oklahoma State Department of Health  
HIV/STD Service  
1000 N.E. Tenth, Room 614  
Oklahoma City, OK 73117-1299  
Phone: (405) 271-4636  
Fax: (405) 271-5149  
[www.health.ok.gov](http://www.health.ok.gov)

Division of STD Prevention  
(DSTDP)  
Centers for Disease Control and  
Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/std](http://www.cdc.gov/std)

Your sexual partner(s) should be tested for Syphilis even if they have no symptoms. If you have been diagnosed with Syphilis, you should have a blood test in three months to detect blood-borne infections you might have contracted at the time you had Syphilis.

## **How is Syphilis diagnosed?**

Syphilis can be diagnosed with simple laboratory tests. Blood tests can confirm the presence of Syphilis.

## **How is Syphilis treated?**

When diagnosed and treated in its early stages, Syphilis is easy to cure. The preferred treatment at all stages is penicillin, an antibiotic medication that can kill the organism that causes Syphilis. If you're allergic to penicillin, your doctor will suggest another antibiotic.

## **How common is Syphilis?**

In Oklahoma, 65 cases of primary and secondary Syphilis were reported in 2007.

In the US, there were over 36,000 cases of Syphilis in 2006, including 9,756 cases of primary and secondary Syphilis.

Between 2005 and 2006, the number of reported P&S syphilis cases increased 11.8 percent. P&S rates have increased in males each year between 2000 and 2006 from 2.6 to 5.7 and among females between 2004 and 2006. In 2006, 64% of the reported P&S syphilis cases were among men who have sex with men (MSM).



Oklahoma State  
Department of Health  
Creating a State of Health

This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health professional's opinion or care.

This publication, printed by DocuTech of the Oklahoma State Department of Health, is issued by the Oklahoma State Department of Health, as authorized by James M. Crutcher, MD, MPH, Commissioner of Health and State Health Officer. 10,000 copies have been printed at a cost of \$400.00. Copies have been deposited with the Publications Clearinghouse of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

# Syphilis

Facts & Information