

Syphilis Facts

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) spread by direct contact during vaginal, anal or oral sex. If left untreated, it can cause brain, nerve, tissue damage and death.

Who gets syphilis?

Anyone can get syphilis; In Denver it most common among men who are having sex with men.

What is the link between syphilis and HIV?

Oral, anal, vaginal, or penile syphilis sores make it easier to transmit and acquire HIV infection. A person is 2 - 5 times more likely to get HIV if exposed when syphilis sores are present.

Symptom overview

Primary and secondary symptoms appear between 10 - 90 days of infection and include:

- A firm, round, and painless sore on the penis, vagina, anus, lips or mouth.
- Skin rashes or sores in the same areas, or on the hands and feet.

What to do if you test positive

- Don't worry. Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics.
- Abstain from sex until sores are healed.
- Contact all sex partners so they can be tested.

How to protect yourself and others

Syphilis symptoms aren't always obvious.

Protect yourself by:

- Getting tested routinely for STDs.
- Always practicing safe sex—talk to your partners about STDs before you have sex and use condoms.
- Avoiding sex if you see sores or other a rash, especially in the groin area.
- Having sex in a monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner.



Testing recommendations

Syphilis is diagnosed through a simple blood test. Denver Public Health recommends routine testing for:

- Men who have sex with men (every 6 months)
- People who have HIV infection (every 3 - 6 months)
- Pregnant women (at prenatal visit and during third trimester, if have multiple sex partners)
- People who have partner(s) who have tested positive for syphilis (immediately)