



GEORGIAN BAY WOMEN*S CLINIC

Syphilis: What You Should Know

What's Syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. It can infect anyone and can cause serious health problems if not treated. It spreads through direct contact with a syphilis sore during sex.

What Are the Symptoms?

Syphilis has different stages, and symptoms vary with each stage. Sometimes, symptoms aren't obvious, so people might not know they have it.

Primary Stage

- A single sore (called a chancre) or multiple sores
- Sores are usually firm, round, and painless
- They appear where syphilis entered the body (genitals, anus, rectum, lips, or mouth)

- Sores last 3 to 6 weeks and heal on their own

Secondary Stage

- Skin rashes, often on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet
- Mucous membrane lesions (sores in the mouth, vagina, or anus)
- Fever, swollen lymph nodes, sore throat
- Hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches, and fatigue

Latent Stage

- No visible symptoms
- Without treatment, the infection remains in the body and can progress to the tertiary stage

Tertiary Stage

- Can occur years after the initial infection
- Can affect multiple organ systems (heart, brain, and other organs)
- Can be fatal if untreated

How Can You Prevent It?

Use Condoms: Always use condoms during sex. They really help reduce the risk.

Get Tested Regularly: Especially if you're at higher risk or have new/multiple partners.

Avoid Contact with Sores: Don't touch sores or rashes, even if they don't hurt.

How Do You Get Tested?

Blood Test: A simple blood test can detect syphilis.

Sample from Sores: If sores are present, a sample from the sore can be tested.

How Is It Treated?

Antibiotics: Syphilis is treated with antibiotics, usually penicillin. The type of treatment depends on the stage of infection.

Follow Directions: Take all your meds even if you feel better.

No Sex: Avoid sex until treatment is completed and your doctor says it's okay.

Tell Your Partners: They need to get tested and treated too, so you don't pass it back and forth.

Follow-Up

Re-Test: Get tested again after 3 months to make sure it's gone, especially if you're pregnant.

Watch Symptoms: If symptoms don't go away or you notice new symptoms, check with your care provider.

Stay Safe: Keep using protection and getting tested to avoid getting it again.

Remember:

- Syphilis can be sneaky, with symptoms that come and go or aren't noticeable.
- Untreated syphilis can lead to serious health problems, including damage to the heart, brain, and other organs.
- Treatment is easy and effective, so don't hesitate to get checked and take care of yourself.