Indiana State Department of Health
Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Syphilis

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). You can get it from having sex (vaginal, anal or oral) with someone who has syphilis. It can be cured with the right medicine.

How is syphilis spread?

Syphilis is a serious disease. You can get it from having sex (vaginal, anal or oral) with someone who has syphilis. It can cause heart and brain damage, blindness and even death. If you are pregnant, your baby can be born dead or with birth defects.

Who is at risk for syphilis?

Anyone can get syphilis. Persons having unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex with men who have sex with men, multiple partners, or anonymous partners are at risk.

How do I know if I have syphilis?

Go to a clinic or a doctor right away to get tested. A blood test will check for syphilis. If you have been exposed to someone with syphilis or you have symptoms that match those described below, your doctor may test you for syphilis.

What are the symptoms of syphilis?

Symptoms include a sore on or around your penis, vagina, mouth or anus. You may see it one week to three months after sex with someone who has syphilis. The sore does not hurt. Many people don't see or feel it at all.

The sore goes away by itself in a few weeks. But you are not cured. A few months later, you may get a rash, fever, sore throat, or hair loss. These problems will also go away. But syphilis stays in your body until you get treated.

How is syphilis treated?

If you have syphilis, you will be given medicine at the clinic. Tell your sex partner(s) that they may have syphilis and need to get checked. Don't have sex until both you and your partner(s) are cured.

How can syphilis be prevented?

Abstinence (not having sex) is the best way to protect yourself from STDs and HIV/AIDS. If you have sex, using a latex condom (rubber) is the best way to protect yourself from STDs. Limit your number of sex partners. The more people you have sex with, the greater your chance of getting an STD. If you have sex with more than one partner, get an STD exam every 6 months.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information and clinic locations call the National STD/HIV InfoLine at 1-800-CDC-INFO.

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