

Syphilis Guide

Types of Syphilis Tests

Syphilis testing is done through blood testing. There are rapid tests and blood draw tests.

- Rapid tests have a window period of 3 months that it can detect any antibodies.
- Rapid tests cannot be done if someone has ever tested positive in the past or been treated as it may always come back reactive even if there is no active infection.
- A blood draw test can detect an active infection, or even a past infection.
- A blood draw will also check for titers which are a unit of measure for syphilis infection.
- Blood draw tests are also done to confirm someone's treatment worked.

Symptoms

Symptoms can include:

- Chancres in mouth or genitals
 - Rash often on hands/feet/torso
 - Mild fever
 - Fatigue
 - Sore Throat
 - Hair loss
 - Swollen Glands
 - Headache
 - Muscle Pain
- Tertiary Stage Symptoms:
- Blindness
 - Damage to nerves, brain and heart
 - Dementia
 - Death

Disclosing to Partners

Telling a partner can be hard, but keep in mind that most people with an STI don't know they have it. Syphilis can be detrimental to someone's health so it's important to disclose to partners so they can get treatment as soon as possible. It is possible to pass syphilis back and forth, so if someone gets treated they should wait until their partner is also cleared before resuming sex.

tellyourpartner.org

Is also a great site that allows you to send an anonymous text message to your partner(s).

If Someone Has Fallen out of Care/ Additional Testing Sites

**Colorado Health Network
(Medicaid/Insurance)**

303-962-5317

**Denver Health Sexual Health Clinic
(insured/uninsured)**

303-602-3540

**Planned Parenthood
(insured/medicaid/uninsured)**

303-832-5069

Your Primary Care Provider

Information Provided by:

<https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-syphilis.htm>



**Queer-Focused Sexual
Health Center**

**HeyDenver.org
303-962-2880**

What is Syphilis?

- Syphilis is a bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- It is very treatable if caught in time. Syphilis needs treatment, it does not go away on its own even if symptoms seem to subside.
- Infection develops in stages (primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary) and symptoms vary by stage, although any symptom can occur at any stage.

How is Syphilis Transmitted?

- The infection can be transmitted through any exchange of bodily fluids (blood, semen, and vaginal fluids,) and direct contact with an open sore.
- Syphilis bacteria are extremely fragile, they cannot be spread during contact with objects such as toilet seats, towels, pools or sharing utensils or clothes.
- Syphilis can be transmitted during pregnancy or during childbirth from parent to infant.

Reducing Possible Transmission

Safer sex practices like condom use, routine testing, and talking to partners about their testing habits may help reduce possible transmission.

Stages

- **PRIMARY STAGE-** Usually marked by the appearance of a single sore, known as a chancre, that is usually (but not always) firm, round, and painless. It will appear within 10 to 90 days after contact with the bacteria at the site of infection and usually occurs in, on, or around the penis, vagina, anus, rectum, and lips or in the mouth. The sore can last from three to six weeks. The chancre will go away with or without treatment. Without treatment, the person will still have syphilis and can transmit it to others.
- **SECONDARY STAGE-** Can develop 17 days to 6 1/2 months after infection. Symptoms can last from 2 to 6 weeks. Symptoms can include a rough, reddish-brown rash that tends to begin on your torso but eventually covers your entire body — even the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet. This rash is usually not itchy and may be accompanied by wart-like sores in your mouth or genital area. Some people also experience hair loss, muscle aches, a fever, a sore throat and swollen lymph nodes. Symptoms of secondary syphilis will clear up with or without treatment, but the disease will still be present if untreated.

- **LATENT STAGE-** If you aren't treated for syphilis, the disease moves from the secondary stage to the hidden (latent) stage, when you have no symptoms. The latent stage can last for years. Latent syphilis develops from two to 30+ years after infection.
- **TERTIARY-** About 15% to 30% of people infected with syphilis who don't get treatment will develop complications known as tertiary syphilis. In the late stage, the disease may damage the brain, nerves, eyes, heart, blood vessels, liver, bones, and joints. These problems may occur many years after the original, untreated infection. This damage will not be reversed by curing the Syphilis infection. Symptoms of late-stage or tertiary syphilis can occur 2 to 30+ years after infection.

Treatment

- Penicillin is used to treat syphilis. Even if someone has a true penicillin allergy.
- Most providers will provide a neuro syphilis exam to see if there are any other effects from the infection.
- It is recommended to refrain from sex until after treatment is confirmed to have worked or until the person is no longer symptomatic.
- Treatment can stop the infection from worsening symptoms but it cannot reverse any damage done by syphilis.
- Even after successful treatment, you can get syphilis again.