

Syphilis, patient information (21/10/2016)

County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet.

Why have you been given this information?

You have been or are suspected of having been infected with syphilis. This sheet provides information about syphilis, how it can be treated and what you need to do.

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a bacterium that is usually found in the mucous membranes in the urethra, vagina, rectum and throat. The bacteria can also be present in the blood. You can have syphilis for several years without knowing.

How do you catch syphilis?

Syphilis is usually spread through unprotected sex, either vaginal, anal or oral sex. A mother may infect her child during pregnancy.

Syphilis does **not** spread through clothes, towels or on toilet surfaces because the bacteria cannot survive outside of the body. You can catch syphilis more than once.

Can you tell if you have syphilis?

The majority of people infected with syphilis have no symptoms. This means that often you cannot tell that you have the infection.

Some people develop sores on or close to their genitals, in their mouths or rectum. These sores usually clear up after a few weeks. Some people develop a rash over their body, often also on the palms of their hands and soles of their feet.

Even if you do not have any symptoms, syphilis is highly infectious.

Is syphilis dangerous?

Without treatment, syphilis can cause serious damage to the whole body.

How do you treat syphilis?

Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics (injection or tablets). If you take the medicine as instructed and follow the advice you have been given, the infection will clear up. Treatment is free.

You **must** return to the clinic if you are given a follow-up appointment. A new test may also be needed to make sure that the infection is gone.

When you have syphilis, you **must not risk infecting other people**. The safest way to do this is to not have intercourse or any other form of sex until the doctor has told you that you are free of syphilis. If you do have sex, you **must** tell your sexual partner that you have syphilis and you **must** use protection (condom/femidom).

Does it always show up on tests that I have had syphilis?

If you are tested for syphilis, it will always be evident that you have had the infection. A different form of syphilis test will show if you have been infected again.

Contact tracing – what does this mean?

It is very important that people with syphilis are found so they can receive treatment. This is partly to reduce the risk of complications (see above) and partly to prevent the infection from spreading to others.

If you are diagnosed with syphilis, you must tell a contact tracing officer the names of the people you have had sex/intercourse with, sometimes the names of people you had sex with up to one year ago.

What you tell the contact tracing officer is confidential and the people you name will not be told who you are. They will only be told that they must get tested.

Syphilis is covered by the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act – what does this mean?

There are procedures in the Communicable Diseases Act to stop the spread of infections such as syphilis to others. If you have or are suspected of having syphilis, you **must follow these procedures** from your doctor:

- You must return for a follow-up appointment if the doctor tells you to.
- You must tell anyone you have sex with that you have/may have syphilis.
- You must use barrier protection if you have sex before your treatment/testing has been completed.

If you have been given a rule of conduct which you think is wrong, you can contact the County Medical Officer in your county.

Would you like to know more?

More information about syphilis can be found on

www.1177.se

www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se

www.umo.se (youth guidance centres online)