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## WHAT DO YOU GET AS A MEMBER?

- Special members discount rates for consultations at SHFPACT clinic and Canberra Menopause Centre.
- 5% discount on bookshop purchases.
- Free or discounted attendance at health information and special events. For example: Healthy Menopause Information Evenings by the Canberra Menopause Centre, Parent Information Evenings about communicating with your children and young people about puberty, relationships, etc.
- SHFPACT members enews that will keep you updated with special members events, activities and other services.

JOIN ONLINE AT [shfpact.org.au](http://shfpact.org.au) OR AT RECEPTION



### OPENING HOURS

Please contact our reception staff on 02 6247 3077 or visit [shfpact.org.au](http://shfpact.org.au) for SHFPACT clinic hours

### LOCATION

SHFPACT is conveniently located in the city.

Level 1,  
28 University Avenue  
Canberra ACT 2601

### CONTACT

02 6247 3077  
[shfpact@shfpact.org.au](mailto:shfpact@shfpact.org.au)  
0400 770 999 (SMS ONLY)

### ENGAGE

[shfpact.org.au](http://shfpact.org.au)  
[facebook.com/shfpact](https://facebook.com/shfpact)  
[twitter.com/shfpact](https://twitter.com/shfpact)

### DONATE

All donations to SHFPACT over \$2.00 are tax deductible

### SHFPACT CLINICAL SERVICES

- Contraceptive advice, information and services
- IUDs and other long acting contraceptive options
- Cervical screening
- Canberra Menopause Centre
- Unplanned Pregnancy Counselling Service
- Sexually transmissible infections (STIs): testing, treatment and advice
- Blood borne virus and HIV testing
- Emergency contraception (the 'Morning After' Pill)
- Breast checks and breast awareness education
- Fertility issues and pre-conception advice
- Sexual difficulties and sexuality education
- PrEP information, advice, and prescriptions

SHFPACT is a health promotion charity (HPC) assisted with funding from the ACT Government.



Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT  
Level 1, 28 University Ave, Canberra City  
Call 02 6247 3077 • SMS 0400 770 999  
or email [shfpact@shfpact.org.au](mailto:shfpact@shfpact.org.au)

[shfpact.org.au](http://shfpact.org.au)

Last updated April 2020

I'M ALL ABOUT  
**SYPHILIS**

## WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection caused by a bacteria called *Treponema pallidum*. It is not as common in Australia as it is in some other countries, but there have been increasing diagnoses recently.

Syphilis is easily treated with antibiotics, but without treatment it can cause serious health problems. It has three stages: primary, secondary, and latent syphilis.

## HOW DO YOU CATCH SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is transmitted through skin to skin contact. You can catch it by having oral, vaginal, or anal sex with someone who has syphilis and it is most infectious when a sore or rash is present. Using a condom for all sexual contact will greatly reduce the risk of transmission.

Syphilis can also be transmitted from mother to unborn baby during pregnancy. This can have very serious effects on the baby.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

About 50% of the time there are no symptoms of syphilis infection. When symptoms do occur they will vary depending on the stage of syphilis.

### PRIMARY SYPHILIS

In this stage there may be no symptoms, but typically a hard, painless sore called a chancre, appears about 3-4 weeks after infection (although this can occur between 10 and 90 days after infection).

The sore most often appears on the genitals, however can occur elsewhere. Because these sores are usually painless they may not be noticed, especially if they in a part of the body not easily seen, for example the anus, cervix, or mouth. These sores are highly infectious.

The sores usually clear up after 2-6 weeks but the infection remains in the body if you have not had treatment, and can progress to the next stage. The infection can be passed on to others even if there are no symptoms or if the sore has healed.

### SECONDARY SYPHILIS

Symptoms of secondary syphilis occur about 2-4 months after infection if there has been no treatment. The most common symptom is a painless flat red rash on the chest, back, hands, and feet, including the palms and soles. This rash is highly infectious

There may also be flu like symptoms, swollen lymph nodes in the groin and armpits, tiredness, hair loss, and a genital rash. These symptoms can come and go for up to two years if you are not treated.

## LATENT SYPHILIS

If syphilis is not treated in the primary or secondary stage it then becomes latent. In latent syphilis there are no symptoms and it is not infectious. If syphilis is diagnosed and treated early in this phase there are usually no problems. However, if it is not treated it can progress to tertiary syphilis in about a third of infected people. Tertiary syphilis can cause serious problems in almost any part of the body, but mainly in the heart and brain, and can be fatal.

## HOW SYPHILIS CAN BE PREVENTED?

Syphilis can be prevented by using condoms correctly every time you have sex, and also by you and your sexual partner/s having regular testing for sexually transmitted infections with early treatment when infection is found. For useful tips on condom use, check out our condom fact sheet.

## HOW DO YOU TEST FOR SYPHILIS?

A blood test looking for antibodies to the *Treponema* bacteria can diagnose syphilis and is also used to monitor response to treatment. Sometimes more than one test is needed. If a sore is present swabs can be collected to look for the presence of the bacteria. Blood tests which are done routinely during pregnancy include syphilis testing.

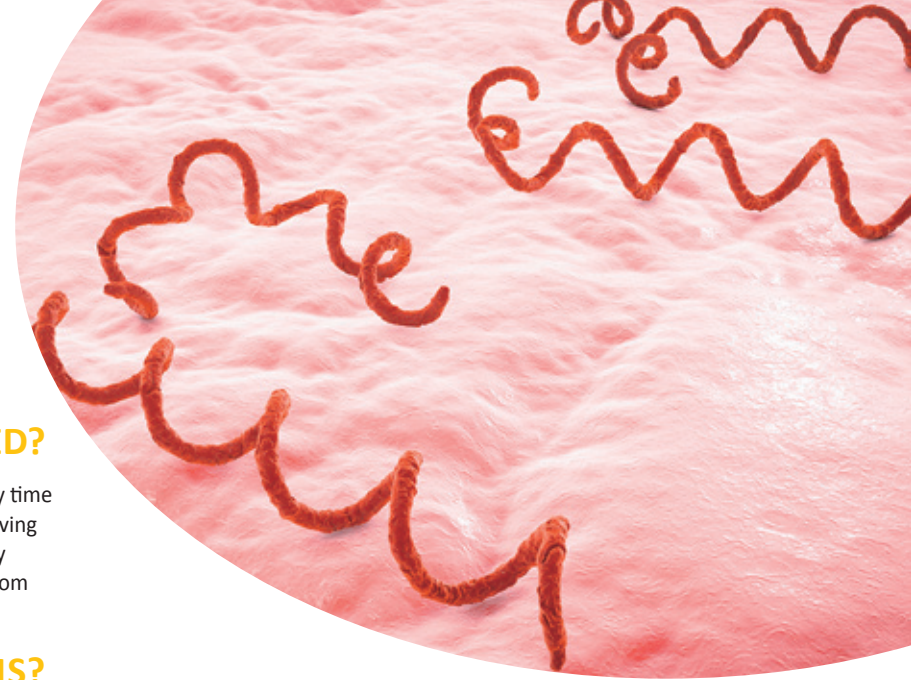
## WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

Syphilis is treated with penicillin given as an injection. Latent syphilis may require a longer course of treatment than the other stages. If someone with syphilis has an allergy to penicillin other antibiotic treatment is available.

Some people, especially those with early stages of infection, are likely to experience a flu like illness when they are treated. If this occurs it usually does so within 24 hours after treatment. Symptoms may include fever, headache, sweats, and joint pain. It lasts for several hours and simple supportive treatment of an analgesia such as paracetamol, fluids and rest is usually all that is needed.

After treatment sexual contact of any type should be avoided until the rash or chancre has healed, and until at least one week after treatment has finished. Your partner/s may need treatment, and it is important to wait for one week after their treatment before having sexual contact in order to avoid being re-infected.

Follow up blood testing at 3 and 6 months (and sometimes 12 months) is usually recommended to ensure the treatment has been effective.



## DO I NEED TO LET MY SEXUAL PARTNERS KNOW?

If you have been diagnosed with syphilis all your sexual partners in the last few months need to be told as they will need testing and treatment. If they do not have treatment they could end up with severe problems and may also re-infect you. You will need to discuss this with your practitioner.

There are websites that you can use to help contact your partners: [letthemknow.org.au](http://letthemknow.org.au) or [thedramadownunder.info](http://thedramadownunder.info)

## SYPHILIS AND HIV

The presence of syphilis can make HIV transmission more likely and if you have been diagnosed with syphilis you may want to consider using HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) if you are in a risk group.

Talk to your sexual health doctor about this. Testing for syphilis and HIV is usually done at the same time or during the follow-up after treatment.

### REFERENCES:

Syphilis: Australian STI Management Guidelines [sti.guidelines.org.au](http://sti.guidelines.org.au)  
Syphilis, Australian Contact Tracing Manual [contacttracing.ashm.org.au](http://contacttracing.ashm.org.au)  
Sexual Health Information, Fact Sheets, Syphilis  
Melbourne Sexual Health Centre [mshc.org.au](http://mshc.org.au)