

About syphilis

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is caused by a bacterial infection. The disease has different stages and can lead to a severe disease course if left untreated.

How is syphilis transmitted?

Syphilis is transmitted during sexual contact via the mucous membranes of the genitals, mouth or anus. Transmission from mother to child can occur during pregnancy and may lead to stillbirth or a severe infection in the child (congenital syphilis). The transmission risk is very high in the early stages of the disease. If the mother receives treatment within the first four months of pregnancy, the child is rarely infected.

Why is important to be tested for syphilis?

If you come from a country where syphilis is widespread, it is important to take a syphilis test. This is particularly important for pregnant women, so they are routinely screened. It is also important to know whether you are infected so that you can avoid infecting other people. If you are unsure whether or not you may have been exposed to infection, you can still request a test. Testing is voluntary and free.

What are the symptoms of syphilis?

Syphilis can progress without symptoms and can take up to 3 months before the disease is detected by blood tests.

Early in the disease course, some people will notice a painless sore where the bacterium entered the body, for example on the genitals, anus, fingers or mouth. The wound will heal by itself within a few weeks. Left untreated, approximately half of those who are infected will eventually develop other symptoms (within a few weeks, months, or up to 2 years). The most common symptoms are fatigue, rash, swollen lymph nodes and hair loss. The rash is typically seen on the upper body, in the palms of the hands and on the soles of the feet. Syphilis can also infect the central nervous system and affect vision and hearing. If untreated over many years, syphilis can lead to cardiovascular and brain diseases.

How can you avoid contracting syphilis?

The most important step to protect yourself against syphilis infection is to use a condom during vaginal and anal intercourse, as well as during oral sex.

What kind of follow-up will you get with a positive syphilis test result?

If your test is positive, you will be referred to a specialist for assessment and antibiotic treatment will be considered. Treatment is effective, and you will fully recover and be free of infection. However, you could be re-infected.

Screening, treatment and follow-up are free. Follow-up involves blood test checks at 3, 6 and 12 months after treatment is completed.

The test results will not affect an application for residence in Norway.