

SYPHILIS

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) which is contracted through sexual activity, which means contact between the genital organs or the genital organ and the mucous membrane in the mouth or rectum. The disease can also be transmitted from mother to baby during pregnancy and through blood transfusion.

Syphilis has been virtually eliminated from Norway in the last decade, but is now reappearing. There have been outbreaks in Oslo among homosexual men. The disease is now also appearing more often among heterosexuals. Syphilis has a high prevalence rate in former Soviet Union countries, in many developing countries and in some of the large cities in the USA.

Proper use of a condom will protect against catching the disease. The condom must be on during the entire intercourse.

SYMPTOMS

Syphilis develops in three stages:

Stage 1

Around three weeks after being infected, a lesion (sore) will appear where the bacteria have penetrated the body. The lesion will often be on the genitals, but could also be in the rectum, in the mouth or other parts of the body. The lesion is not especially painful and after a few weeks it will disappear on its own without treatment. The lymph nodes closest to the lesion will swell, but are not sore. Sometimes, the first stage of the disease is not noticeable.

Stage 2

If the disease is not treated in Stage 1, after a couple of months it will progress into Stage 2. The most common complaints in Stage 2 are different kinds of skin lesions or rashes on the body, hair loss, swollen lymph nodes, a slight fever, headaches and fatigue.

Latency

If the disease is not treated in Stage 2, it will progress to a new latent stage where the infected person will most likely not notice the symptoms. The risk of sexual transmission of the disease will diminish, but a foetus can still be infected during pregnancy.

Stage 3

After many years the disease can progress to a third stage where it attacks the brain, the heart and blood vessels, the skin and bones.

EXAMINATION

A simple blood test taken by a doctor will show if the patient has syphilis. However, it may be a few weeks after infection before the test will be positive.

TREATMENT

Penicillin injections are 100 percent effective against syphilis. There are other effective medicines for those who are allergic to penicillin.

An infected person must not have sex before having been declared healthy.

FREE EXAMINATION AND TREATMENT

Syphilis is defined as a contagious disease in the Act relating to control of communicable diseases. Therefore anyone suffering from this disease is entitled to a free examination and treatment. It is important to inform current and former partners that you have been infected. The doctor and patient must cooperate on tracing all sexual contacts of the patient to establish if any have been infected and require treatment.