

## FAQ about syphilis

### What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease which is caused by bacteria. The disease can occur in different stages and can cause serious illness if it remains untreated.

### How is syphilis transmitted?

Syphilis is transmitted sexually through mucous membranes in the genitals, mouth or anus. Infection from mother to child during pregnancy can cause serious congenital disease in the child. The risk of infection depends on the stage of the disease.

### Should I take a syphilis test?

If you come from a country with a high occurrence of syphilis, you will be offered a free test. The test involves giving a blood sample and is voluntary. If it is possible you have been exposed to syphilis, you may be asked to take a free test.

If you come from a region where syphilis is widespread, it is important to get yourself tested regardless of whether or not you are experiencing any symptoms. This is particularly important for pregnant women. If your test is positive, you will receive free treatment to help you recover. It is also important to know whether you are infected so that you can avoid infecting other people.

### What are the symptoms of syphilis?

If you were infected with syphilis several years ago, you will not normally experience any symptoms. Recent syphilis infections can produce a wide variety of symptoms. Unlike many other sexually transmitted diseases, syphilis does not normally cause stinging and discharge from the genitals.

The most commonly occurring symptom is a painless sore in the area where the bacteria entered the body, e.g. on the genitals, anus, fingers or mouth. Left untreated, around half of those infected will develop other symptoms within a few months. The most common of these are fatigue, rash, swollen lymph nodes and hair loss. Of these, around a third will experience the most serious form of syphilis many years after they became infected. This can give rise to cardiovascular and brain diseases.

### How can I protect myself against syphilis infection?

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

### What can be done if I am infected with syphilis?

If your test result is positive, you will be considered for treatment using antibiotics. After treatment, you will recover fully and you will not be able to infect other people. Treatment

is administered using a syringe. You will often need to be referred to a specialist for the treatment.