

# **Health Care Education**

## **Syphilis**



### **Hidayah Foundation**

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*And when I am sick, then He heals me. - - - Al Quran – Ash-Shuraa, Verse 26:80*

## **Syphilis**

### **What is Syphilis?**

Syphilis is a highly contagious disease caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*. It can cause serious long-term health problems such as arthritis, brain damage, and blindness.

### **How does one get Syphilis?**

Syphilis is spread primarily by sexual activity, including oral and anal sex. Occasionally, the disease can be passed to another person through prolonged kissing or close bodily contact with an infected person. Although this disease is spread from sores, the vast majority of these sores go unrecognized. The infected person is often unaware of the disease and unknowingly passes it on to their sexual partner.

Pregnant women with the disease can spread it to their babies. This disease, called congenital syphilis, can cause abnormalities or even death to the child.

Syphilis cannot be spread by toilet seats, door knobs, swimming pools, hot tubs, bath tubs, shared clothing or eating utensils.

### **What are the symptoms of Syphilis?**

Syphilis infection occurs in 3 distinct stages.

*Early or primary syphilis.* People with primary syphilis will develop one or more chancre sores. The sores resemble large round bug bites and are often hard and painless. They occur on

the genitals or in or around the mouth somewhere between 10-90 days after exposure. Even without treatment they heal without a scar within 6 weeks.

*The secondary stage* may last 1-3 months and begins within 6 weeks to 6 months after exposure. People with secondary syphilis experience a reddish rash typically on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet.

They may also experience moist warts in the groin, white patches on the inside of the mouth, swollen lymph glands, fever, and weight loss. Like primary syphilis, secondary syphilis will resolve without treatment.

*Latent syphilis.* This is where the infection lies dormant (inactive) without causing symptoms.

### **What is the impact of Syphilis on health?**

The disease untreated may result in severe problems in the heart, brain, and nerves that can result in paralysis, blindness, dementia, deafness, impotence and even death.

Depending on how long a pregnant woman has been infected, she has a good chance of having a stillbirth (birth of an infant who has died prior to delivery) or of giving birth to a baby who dies shortly after birth.

If not treated immediately, an infected baby may be born without symptoms but could develop them within a few weeks. Untreated babies may

## **Health Care Education**

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become developmentally delayed, have seizures or die.

#### ***How is Syphilis diagnosed?***

Syphilis can be easily diagnosed with a quick and inexpensive blood test. If you have a chancre sore (a dull red, hard, insensitive lesion that is the first manifestation of syphilis), your doctor will take a swab or scraping off the sore. It will then be sent to a lab to analyze under a microscope for the characteristic bacteria.

#### ***How can Syphilis be prevented?***

Syphilis can be prevented by reducing the risk of infection:

- Avoid intimate contact with a person you know is infected

- If you do not know if a sexual partner is infected, use a condom in every sexual encounter
- contact with these infectious sores and other infected tissues and body fluids must be avoided to prevent spread of the disease
- Testing and treatment early in pregnancy is the best way to prevent syphilis in infants

#### ***When Should I consult a Doctor?***

If you have more than one sex partner, you should consult a doctor about any suspicious rash or sore in the genital area. Those who have been treated for another STD such as gonorrhea should be tested to be sure they have not acquired syphilis.

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Sources: WebMD, Health Central, and other sources freely available on the internet.