

SYPHILIS - SIFILIDE

Syphilis is a contagious disease caused by a bacterium known as *Treponema pallidum*. Syphilis is a very serious infection that spreads through the body. If not cured, syphilis can cause heart disease, dementia, blindness, paralysis, and death. Syphilis can be contracted by having direct sexual contact (vaginal sex or oral sex) with infected individuals (acquired syphilis), yet, it can also be transmitted from an infected mother to her fetus (congenital syphilis).

Congenital syphilis can result in fetal death in 40% of cases or in the birth of infected children who can be born blind or have other serious organ damage.

A syphilis infection can increase the risk of becoming infected by HIV, the AIDS provoking virus.

HOW DOES SYPHILIS MANIFEST ITSELF?

The first symptom of syphilis is usually an ulcer, a small, painless lesion (chancre) in the area of sexual contact (penis, vagina, anus, rectum, or mouth), accompanied by the swelling of lymph nodes in the surrounding area. The lesion usually appears 2-6 weeks after contagion, and disappears within a few weeks.

The following phase is characterized by fever, generalized skin rash, and swelling of the lymph nodes throughout the body (secondary stage). These lesions also spontaneously disappear within 20-70 days without leaving any signs. After several months, or even years, without treatment, tertiary syphilis appears. In this phase, the skin, cardiovascular system, and nervous system are affected, yet, all organs and systems can be involved.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE BEEN INFECTED

A serological test (blood test) can be performed to diagnosis an infection, even if no symptoms arise. This test is a routine test that is performed on all pregnant women during their first trimester. Syphilis can also be diagnosed through the microscopic exam of a lesion sample.

HOW TO PREVENT CONTRACTING SYPHILIS

The prevention used for syphilis is based on the strict use of correct behavior: limiting the number of sexual partners and using condoms, especially during occasional sex:

- If an infection occurs, avoid sexual contact until completely recovered, making sure that your partner(s) also receive therapy to prevent becoming infected, again;
- If you are pregnant, contact your gynecologist for a routine blood test: **preventing and diagnosing congenital syphilis depends upon a timely diagnosis of the infection in the mother-to-be.** If during pregnancy you have unprotected sex with new partners, do not hesitate in repeating the test, and remember to use condoms.

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