

# Syphilis

## Treponema Pallidum



**Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by bacteria and can be cured with penicillin or other antibiotics. You can get syphilis over again even after treatment and it can greatly increase the risk of you getting HIV. People can have syphilis without having symptoms for years if not treated. Pregnant women can give syphilis to their babies. Men and women can give syphilis to their sex partners.**



### How is it spread and who gets syphilis?

- ▶ Syphilis is spread by touching a chancre which is a small painless sore that is on the penis or in the vagina, rectum, or mouth. Babies can get syphilis during pregnancy if the mother has it as well.
- ▶ If you have sex, you can get syphilis; however, there are groups of people more likely to get syphilis:
  - Men who like having sex with other men.
  - People living with HIV.
  - People with a sex partner who has an STD, more than one sex partner, and/or a new sex partner.



### What are the signs and symptoms?

- ▶ Most people have NO symptoms when they have syphilis, but find out when they get tested.
- ▶ A person may get a small, painless sore called a chancre which is on the penis or in the vagina, rectum, or mouth. The chancre will last about three weeks before it heals. A person may then get a rash which can be mistaken for other skin rashes and can last about four weeks. The rash will heal, but people with untreated syphilis can suffer very serious health effects.



### What are the testing and treatment options?

- ▶ You can get tested for syphilis at a doctor's office, family planning clinic, or an STD clinic. Getting tested and treated early can prevent problems and stop the spread of syphilis. If you have syphilis, get your recent sex partners of the past three months tested AND treated. They may not have symptoms or test positive but still have syphilis. If you have sex with the same partner, you can get infected unless they get tested and treated.
- ▶ You can get treated with penicillin or doxycycline. The longer you have syphilis the more treatment you may need. If left untreated, the damage syphilis can cause includes: a loss of eyesight or hearing, damage to your heart and other organs, mental illness and even death. Pregnant women with untreated syphilis can have a miscarriage or a stillbirth.



### How can I prevent getting syphilis?

- ▶ There are many ways to prevent getting syphilis and it's as easy as **ABC**:
  - A**void having sex until you feel prepared to protect yourself. For instance;
  - B**e monogamous or have sex with just one person who only has sex with you and doesn't have any STDs. You can find out if both of you have an STD like syphilis by getting tested together.
  - C**ondoms can protect you from getting syphilis but only where they cover. If you are not using them for oral sex, you can still get syphilis.

