

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

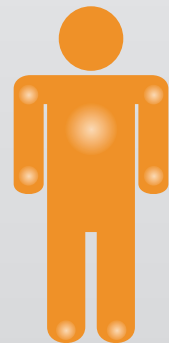
People with the infection do not all develop visible symptoms. Syphilis symptoms can be very discreet.

Syphilis generally evolves in three stages:



### STAGE 1

- One or several **lesions** appear **9 to 90 days** (usually 3 weeks) after having sexual relations with someone who is infected.
- These lesions evolve into ulcers, also called “syphilitic chancres”. They are usually painless. Most of the time, the lesions are found at the place where the germ entered the body: **penis, scrotum, pubis, anus, vulva, or in the vagina**; ulcers are also found **in the mouth, or on the lips or tongue**. Lesions inside the anus, vagina or throat often go unnoticed. Swollen glands in the groin can also develop along with these chancres.
- Lesions disappear on their own in 3 to 8 weeks, even if they are not treated. But the infection is still in the body and can develop.



### STAGE 2

- **6 weeks to 6 months (usually 8 weeks)** after getting the infection, flu-like symptoms may appear: **fatigue, fever, headaches, muscle and joint pain, painless swollen glands**.
- A **skin rash** (small light pink patches on the skin, red patches on mucous membranes) can appear on the chest, armpits and groin, on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, or on mucous membranes. The rash is not itchy.
- Just like in stage 1, symptoms disappear on their own, without treatment, while the infection continues to develop silently.



### STAGE 3

- Years later (**10 to 30 years**), syphilis left untreated can cause **significant damage to the heart, brain, bones or liver**. It can also cause the person to go blind or deaf.

Usually, an infected person who is not treated **can spread syphilis for about up to a year after catching the infection**. He or she can spread the germ **even if there are no visible symptoms**.

## WHAT IS THE INTERACTION BETWEEN SYPHILIS AND HIV?

**Syphilis advances more rapidly to stages 2 or 3** among some people who have HIV (AIDS virus). It can also be **more difficult to treat**.

The nature of syphilitic sores (**entry and exit points** for viruses) means that people who have syphilis:

- can catch the AIDS virus more easily when they have unprotected sexual relations;
- if they already have HIV, they can transmit this virus more easily to other people.

## WHO SHOULD HAVE A SYPHILIS TEST?

Currently, it is recommended that the following people get tested for syphilis:

- Someone whose sexual partner has syphilis;
- Men who have sex with men;
- People who inject drugs;
- Sex trade workers, their clients or partners;
- Someone who has sexual relations with a partner from a country where STIs are widespread;
- Pregnant women.

People on this list who have unprotected oral or genital sex with **several partners** should **be tested every 3 to 6 months**.

Do not hesitate to talk openly with your doctor if you think you should have a syphilis test.

### About the syphilis test

Testing for syphilis requires a blood test. It can take several weeks after someone catches the infection before obtaining a positive test result. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to repeat the test.

## HOW IS IT TREATED?

Syphilis can be treated with **antibiotics**, usually high-dose penicillin. Other treatments are available for people who are allergic to penicillin. Duration of treatment depends on the stage of the infection. Follow-up tests are required after treatment. Medical follow-up is particularly important for people with HIV. Condoms should be used for sexual activities for the duration of the treatment and until the doctor has confirmed the infection is cured.

**Treatment completely cures the infection**. However, any damage done during stage 3 cannot be reversed.

In Québec medications used to treat syphilis are **free** for people who have the infection and their sexual partners. Penicillin is not contraindicated in people taking HIV treatments.

You can catch syphilis **more than once**.

## WHICH SEXUAL PARTNERS SHOULD BE TOLD?

Depending on the stage of syphilis, all:

- sexual partners of the last 3 months (stage 1);
- sexual partners of the last 6 to 12 months (stage 2);
- long-standing sexual partners (stage 3) should be told.

**Partners must be treated even if they do not have symptoms**, and sometimes even if their syphilis test results are negative.

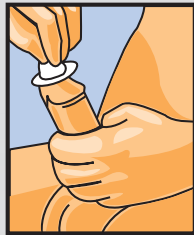
**It is not always easy to inform partners**. In most regions of Quebec, a public health professional specialising in STIs can help you find ways to talk to your partners. This professional can also provide confidential advice, without revealing the identity of the infected person. For more information, call your regional public health department.



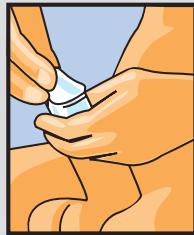
## HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SYPHILIS?

The following precautions help reduce the risk of becoming infected with syphilis:

- Use a **condom** every time you have sex where the penis penetrates the anus, vagina or mouth;
- Reduce your **number of partners**;
- Do not share drug injection equipment (syringes, needles);
- **Get tested regularly**;
- If you are infected, **get treated quickly and make sure that your sexual partners are notified, tested and treated**. It is important to know your partners well enough to be able to contact them if needed.



1. A bit of water-based lubricant inside the condom increases sensation.



2. Pinch the end of the condom to remove any air and unroll it to the base of the penis.



3. Use a water or silicone-based lubricant (avoid Vaseline and oil-based products). After ejaculation, remove your penis while firmly holding the base of the condom.

*Thicker lubricated condoms are recommended for anal relations whereas thinner, non-lubricated or flavoured condoms are fine for oral relations (sucking). Dental dams can also be used during oral sex.*

**For information about syphilis or to find out about the clinics in your region that offer syphilis screening and treatment:**

[www.infoITS.qc.ca](http://www.infoITS.qc.ca)

your CLSC's Info-Santé service

AIDS, herpes, STI help line,  
1-888-855-7432  
514-855-8995 (Montreal)

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et des services sociaux  
de Montréal  
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# SYPHILIS DON'T TURN A BLIND EYE

Use a condom - Get tested regularly

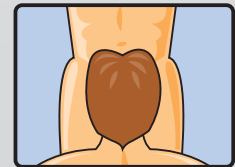
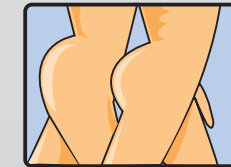
Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacteria.

For the last several years, we have seen a large increase in the number of cases of syphilis in Quebec. Currently, the vast majority of people affected are men who have sex with men. Syphilis epidemics have also been reported in several large cities in Canada, the United States and Europe.

## HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

The infection occurs when the **bacteria, present in syphilis lesions** (sores that can be very discreet and not easily seen), **gets into a mucous membrane** (anus, vagina, penis head, or mouth) **or the skin if there's a scratch** or a wound for example.

- You can catch and spread syphilis when you have sex:
  - oral sex:** mouth-penis, mouth-anus, or mouth-vulva contact
  - genital sex:** penis-penis, penis-anus or penis-vagina



- Syphilis can also spread when a finger is inserted into the anus or vagina (skin-mucous membrane contact).
- In rare cases, syphilis can spread when contaminated drug injection equipment is shared.
- Pregnant women who have syphilis can pass it on to their unborn children during pregnancy. The infection can cause an abortion or stillbirth, or the baby to be born with deformities.