

# Syphilis

District of Columbia  
Department of Health  
STD Control Program

## FACT SHEET

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease that is caused by a bacterium called *Treponema pallidum*. It can spread from person to person during unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Syphilis can also be spread from a mother to her unborn baby.

### Symptoms

- A painless sore on the penis, scrotum, vagina, cervix, anus or mouth
- Rashes on the body (especially on the palms of hands and soles of feet)
- Swollen lymph glands
- Alopecia (loss of hair from the head or body)
- In late syphilis, the brain and heart may be affected

**Symptoms usually appear 1-2 weeks after being exposed to syphilis**

### *How would I know if I have syphilis?*

- If you have a sore on your genitals, get an STD examination.
- A blood test for syphilis is usually performed.
- You could have syphilis and not know it.
- Anytime you have tests for other STDs, be sure to ask for a syphilis blood test.

### *How is syphilis treated?*

- Syphilis can be treated with antibiotics. Penicillin “shots” are usually used.
- A single “shot” is often adequate during the early stages of syphilis. Multiple “shots” are used during later stages of the disease.
- Other antibiotics may be used in people who have an allergy to penicillin.
- **The Southeast STD Clinic will test, diagnose, and treat Syphilis free of charge.**

### *How can I avoid getting syphilis?*

- Avoid unprotected sex. Always use a condom.
- Avoid infection by having one sexual partner.

If you have questions or think you may have Syphilis stop having sex and come to the S.E. STD Clinic for a **FREE and CONFIDENTIAL** Assessment.



### S.E. STD Clinic

DC General  
Hospital Campus  
19th and  
Massachusetts  
Avenue, SE  
Building 8  
Phone:  
(202) 698-4050

**Prevention  
Protects  
Your  
Health**

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
**DOH**  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Promote. Prevent. Protect.

\*\*\*  
Government of the  
District of Columbia  
Adrian M. Fenty, Mayor