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SOAIDS

> Syphilis is caused by bacteria (*Treponema pallidum*). This STI is found mainly in men who have sex with men. Syphilis is easy to treat with an antibiotic. If it is not treated, syphilis can have serious complications.

What will you notice if you have syphilis?

Syphilis develops in stages. During each stage you have different symptoms. In the first and second stage there are sometimes no symptoms at all.

> Stage 1

Ten to 90 days after infection a sore will develop on or in the genitals, anus or mouth. Surrounding lymph glands often become swollen too. The sore disappears by itself within one to three months, but the syphilis is still there and you do remain infectious.

> Stage 2

Four to eight weeks after the sore appears is the start of the second stage. The sore has often gone by then and you may not even have noticed it. During the second stage there could be the following symptoms:

- Flu-like symptoms, with fever, aches and pains, and tiredness
- A skin rash over the whole body (sometimes almost unnoticeable), even on the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet; it doesn't itch
- Bald patches on your head
- Loss of vision, loss of hearing or facial paralysis
- Pale grey, wart-like skin growths on the penis, anus or vagina

You are still infectious during this stage of syphilis.

> Latent phase

If syphilis is not treated, the infection will go into a hidden (latent) phase after one or two years. You won't notice it anymore, but the bacteria remain in your body. You are not infectious for others.

> Stage 3

Without treatment you could enter the third stage of syphilis years later. Many of the organs in your body, such as the heart, brain, spinal cord and bones, could become inflamed or damaged in some way. You could develop meningitis, which can leave you paralysed and in a confused state.

Treatment for syphilis

Syphilis is easy to treat with an antibiotic.

You are usually given penicillin injections. In an early stage of syphilis the doctor will only need to give one injection. If the syphilis is in a late stage, or it is unknown how long you have had the infection, the doctor will send you to an STI clinic or dermatologist. You will usually have to go there three times for two penicillin injections.

- > Are you allergic to penicillin? Then you will be given doxycycline (100 mg) twice a day for two weeks.
- > If you are pregnant, the doctor or your midwife will send you to an STI clinic or dermatologist. You will have to go there three weeks running for a penicillin injection. A paediatrician will examine your baby immediately after birth.

Further advice

- Go to a doctor for treatment as soon as possible.
- Get tested for HIV and other STIs too.
- Don't have sex until seven days after treatment ends.
- Did you not have any symptoms? It is still advisable for your sexual partner to be tested.
- Are you in a relationship? Then use condoms until seven days after you and your partner(s) have finished the treatment and tests show that you have no other STIs.
- Use condoms with other partners.

For more information about syphilis,
go to soaaid.nl/en/syphilis

Warning partners

As syphilis is passed on during unsafe sex, you should tell current and previous sexual partners that you have syphilis.

- > Stage 1: warn your partners of the previous three months
- > Stage 2: warn your partners of the previous six months
- > You have caught syphilis in the past year: warn your partners of the past year.
- > You don't know how long ago you caught syphilis: the person you are in a relationship with (and if you are a woman also your children) should be tested.

It is important that all your sexual partners who have syphilis, and their partners, are treated and cured as soon as possible. This also prevents further spread of the infection. And it ensures that you yourself do not get infected a second time.

- > Is it difficult for you to warn partners yourself? Then ask your local GGD health centre to do it for you. They will be discreet.
partnerwaarschuwing.nl is a Dutch website you can use to warn your partners.

AIDS STI helpline

Do you have a question about syphilis that has not been answered in this leaflet?

- > **Call the AIDS STI helpline:** 0900 204 204 0 (10ct per min.)
Monday and Tuesday: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Wednesday to Friday: 2.– 6 p.m.
- > **Send an email to the AIDS STI helpline:**
Sense@soaids.nl, you will receive an answer within two working days.
- > **Or visit the chat office hour on Soatest.nl**
Monday to Thursday: 1.30 – 3.30 p.m.

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