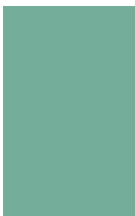
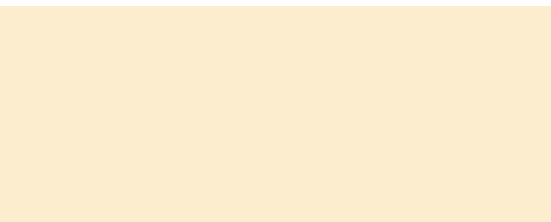


DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION



A community-based effort to eliminate syphilis in the United States.

**SYPHILIS—PHYSICIAN'S POCKET GUIDE**



*Syphilis is a systemic, sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the *Treponema pallidum* bacterium.*

## **SYPHILIS TRANSMISSION**

Three means of syphilis transmission:

- Person to person via vaginal, anal, or oral sex through direct contact with a syphilis chancre.
- Person to person during foreplay, even when there is no penetrative sex (much less common).
- Pregnant mother with syphilis to fetus.

## **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS**

If left untreated, syphilis progresses in stages. The stages are:

### **PRIMARY:**

- One or more chancres (usually firm, round, small, and painless) appear at the site of infection (most often the genital area) 10 to 90 days after infection.
- The chancres heal on their own in 3-6 weeks.
- Patient is highly infectious in the primary stage.



*It is very important for people who test positive for HIV and other STDs to get tested for syphilis, since transmission of HIV is enhanced by syphilis and other STDs.*



## SECONDARY:

- Rashes occur as the chancre(s) fades or a few weeks after the chancre heals.
- Rashes typically appear on the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet, or on the face, but also may appear on other areas of the body.
- Sometimes wart-like “growths” may appear in the genital area.
- Rashes and syphilitic warts tend to clear up on their own within 2-6 weeks, but may take as long as 12 weeks.
- Patient is highly infectious in the secondary stage.

## EARLY LATENT:

- Patient is seroreactive within one year of onset of infection, but has no symptoms.
- Patient is potentially infectious.

## TREATMENT

---

### Primary, Secondary, or Latent <1 year

2.4 million units IM of Benzathine Penicillin G in a single dose

---

### Latent >1 year, latent of unknown duration, late cardiovascular, gumma

2.4 million units IM of Benzathine Penicillin G in 3 doses at 1 week intervals (7.2 million units total)

---

### Pregnant women

Treatment during pregnancy should be the penicillin regimen appropriate for the stage of syphilis (See CDC Treatment Guidelines)

---

### Neurosyphilis

3 to 4 million units IV of Aqueous Crystalline Penicillin G every 4 hours for 10-14 days (18-24 million units/day)

---

### Penicillin allergies

See CDC Treatment Guidelines

---

*Note:* For treatment information on congenital syphilis and syphilis in children (early, primary, secondary, latent—both <1 year and >1 year or of unknown duration, and late latent) please see **CDC Treatment Guidelines** at <http://www.cdc.gov/STD/treatment/>.

## LATE LATENT:

- Patient is seroreactive more than 1 year after onset of infection, but has no symptoms.
- Patient is not infectious in late latent stage.

## LATE (TERTIARY):

- Manifestations in the skin and bones (gummas), central nervous system, and cardiovascular system.
- Patient is not infectious in late stage.

## DIAGNOSIS

- Dark-field examinations or direct fluorescent antibody tests of chancre tissue are the definitive methods for diagnosing primary and secondary syphilis.



**DARK-FIELD  
MICROSCOPY**

- A presumptive diagnosis is possible with sequential serologic tests (e.g. VDRL, RPR), using the same testing method each time. A fourfold change in titer (e.g. from 1:8 to 1:32) is usually considered to be clinically significant. Confirmatory tests should be performed.
- Examine patient thoroughly and obtain sexual history, as many patients do not notice the signs and symptoms of syphilis because chancres can be hidden in the vagina, rectum, or mouth.
- Contact local health department for information and partner notification. Report presumptive and confirmed cases of syphilis within one working day of the diagnosis.

For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/std/see/](http://www.cdc.gov/std/see/) or contact your local health department.

