

Syphilis

in Utah

*Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by *Treponema pallidum*. Syphilis is transmitted from person-to-person by direct contact with a syphilitic sore (called a chancre), rash, or ulcers which can occur in, on, or around the penis, vagina, anus, rectum, and lips or mouth. Syphilis can be spread during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. In Utah, the majority of syphilis cases are seen in males ages 30-34. Men who have sex with men shoulder disproportionately higher rates of disease. Syphilis is a complex infection with many stages. The only way to know what stage you may be in is to get tested and have any symptoms reviewed by a physician. If syphilis goes untreated for many years, it can be fatal.*

How can syphilis be prevented?

Even though a syphilis infection can be treated with antibiotics prescribed by a healthcare provider, it can also be prevented. The only 100% effective way to prevent a syphilis infection or other STIs is to abstain from vaginal, anal, and oral sex. There are many effective methods to protect against syphilis and other STIs if you choose to be sexually active, including:

- ✓ Barrier prevention methods such as male/female condoms, dental dams, etc.
- ✓ Fewer sexual partners
- ✓ Practice mutual monogamy (sexual partners agree to only have sex with each other)

These types of methods can help prevent the spread of syphilis. Those who feel as if they may have been exposed or experience symptoms should stop having sex immediately and get tested. Those who test positive should seek treatment from a qualified medical provider.

Still have questions?

Visit us at [Catch the Answers](#) or reach out to your [Local Health Department](#).



Stages and symptoms of syphilis

Primary stage:

- Sores called chancres appear where syphilis enters the body
- These sores are typically firm, round, and painless

Secondary stage:

- Skin rashes and/or mucous membrane lesions (sores in the mouth, vagina, or anus)
- Fever
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Sore throat
- If left untreated, the infection will progress to the latent and possibly tertiary stage

Latent (hidden) stage:

- No visible signs or symptoms even though syphilis remains in the body and continues to cause harm
- This stage can last for years and cause significant damage to vital organs

Tertiary syphilis:

- Symptoms can adversely affect the brain, nerves, eyes, heart, blood vessels, liver, bones, or joints. If left untreated, it can cause death