

Questions about syphilis or other STDs? Contact:

- ❖ **Your Tribal Clinic**
- ❖ **National STD Hotline - 1-800-227-8922**
- ❖ **National Indian AIDS Line - 1-800-283-2437**
- ❖ **Hepatitis Information - 1-800-223-0179**
- ❖ **National Herpes Hotline - 1-919-361-8488**
- ❖ **CDC National AIDS Hotline - 1-800-342-AIDS**
- ❖ **Alcohol, Drug & Pregnancy Hotline - 1-800-638-BABY**
- ❖ **Boystown National Youth Hotline - -800-448-3000**
- ❖ **National Gay & Lesbian Youth Hotline - 1-800-676-TEEN**

Quick Quiz! (answers below)

1. Syphilis is caused by a:
a. Bacteria b. Virus
c. Protozoa d. Fungus
2. You can get syphilis by direct contact with a _____.
3. True or False: Syphilis is curable.
4. True or False: When a symptom (like a chancre or skin rash) heals without treatment, this means you're getting better.
5. What is the only foolproof way to prevent syphilis?
6. True or False: Condoms protect you from syphilis.

Answers: 1: A 2: Chancre 3: T 4: F 5: Abstinence
6: T, if used consistently and correctly, and only if every
chancre is covered by the condom.



PROJECT RED TALON

The activities of Project Red Talon are funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This project is designed to provide tribes in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington with education, training, and technical assistance for the prevention and treatment of STDs.

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For more information contact:

Stephanie Craig Rushing, MPH
Project Director—Project Red Talon
sraig@npaihb.org

Lisa Griggs
Administrative Assistant—Project Red Talon
lgriggs@npaihb.org

Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board

527 SW Hall, Suite 300
Portland, OR 97201
Phone: (503) 228-4185
Toll Free: (887) 955-5519
Fax: (503) 228-8182

www.npaihb.org

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Syphilis



PROJECT RED TALON

"Respecting Our Bodies and Relationships"

**Northwest Portland Area
Indian Health Board**

What Is Syphilis?



Syphilis is an STD caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*, which can enter the body through the skin, mouth, or anus.

The most common sign of infection is a sore called a “chancre.”

Chancres last 3-6 weeks, and heal without treatment. When a chancre heals by itself, this does **NOT** mean that the syphilis infection is healing or going away — in fact, it means the disease is progressing to the next stage.

How Do I Get It?

Syphilis is passed person-to-person through direct contact with a chancre.

You CAN get syphilis from:

- Vaginal, anal, or oral sex
- Being born to an infected mother

You CANNOT get syphilis from:

- Shared clothing
- Eating utensils
- Toilet seats, doorknobs, etc.
- Swimming pools & hot tubs



REMEMBER - You can get syphilis again (be re-infected), even if you’ve had it before and were successful treated.

Quick Fact:

Syphilis has been called “The Great Imitator” because many of its signs & symptoms are the same as other diseases.

Stages of Syphilis

Primary Stage - In this stage, there is usually a single chancre (although there can be more than one). Chancres usually show up 10-90 days after you get infected. Left untreated, the chancre will disappear and the disease will progress to the secondary stage.

Secondary Stage - A skin rash will appear, followed by mucous membrane lesions. If left untreated, the rash will heal, and the disease will progress to the tertiary stage.

Characteristics of the skin rash:

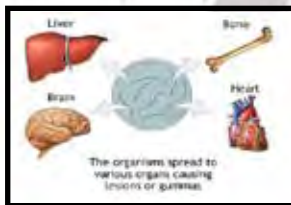
- Rough, red or reddish-brown spots on the palms of your hands or bottoms of your feet.
- Can develop while chancre is healing, or a few weeks after it has healed.
- Usually not itchy.
- Can be so mild it goes unnoticed.



Other symptoms:

- Fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches, fatigue.

Tertiary Stage - Also called the hidden stage. It begins when the secondary symptoms disappear.



The bacteria damages internal organs like the brain, heart, nerves, blood vessels, liver, bones, and joints. Signs of this damage

may not be apparent until years later, but once the damage is done, you can’t reverse or fix it.

Diagnosis

Laboratory tests can be performed on material taken from a chancre to detect the bacteria. A blood test can be used to detect antibodies (antibodies stay in the blood for months or years, even after treatment).

Treatment

- ❖ In the early stages, syphilis is easy to cure. If you’ve had syphilis less than a year, an injection of an antibiotic will cure it. If you’ve had syphilis longer than a year, you will need additional doses.
- ❖ There are no over-the-counter treatments for syphilis.
- ❖ While on treatment, you can still infect others until ALL chancres are completely healed.

Reduce your Risk - What Works:

- **Abstinence.**
- **Sticking to one mutually-monogamous partner, who has been tested for STDs.**
- **Good communication between partners about sexual history, including STDs.**
- **Avoiding alcohol and drugs.**
- **Latex condoms (used consistently and correctly, and only if all chancres are covered).**
- **Combining any of the above.**

What DOESN'T Work:

- “Pulling out”
- **Condoms (if chancres are not covered).**
- **Birth control (pills, injection, etc.).**
- **Washing genitals, urinating, or douching after sex.**