What you should know about Syphilis

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a very serious STD (sexually transmitted disease). It is caused by a germ you can get from any sexual contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus of a person who has the disease. A pregnant woman can pass it to her unborn child.

Many people do not know they have syphilis.

Many people with syphilis look and feel healthy. But you can still pass the disease to others even if you don't have symptoms. Too many people don't realize they have it until they have severe health problems.

Syphilis can be deadly!

Syphilis can be very harmful for both women and men if it isn't treated early.

What are the symptoms of syphilis?

Syphilis often begins as a sore, called a chancre ("shank-er"), where the germ has entered the body. This sore mostly occurs on or near the sex organs, but it can also occur around the mouth or anus. The sore does not hurt and it goes away without treatment after a few weeks, **but you still have the disease.**

Later, there may be other symptoms, such as:

- Rashes on the palms of the hands and bottoms of the feet
- Hair loss
- Headaches, fever and sore throat
- Aches in the bones
- Swollen joints

These symptoms will also go away without treatment, but you still have the disease. If left untreated over a period of years, the disease can cause:

- Arthritis
- Blindness
- Heart disease
- Mental illness
- Death

How would you know if you have syphilis?

The only way to be sure is to get tested at your doctor's office or an STD clinic. A simple blood test can tell if you have the disease.

What about syphilis and pregnancy?

All pregnant women should be tested for syphilis at their first prenatal visit and at delivery. A pregnant woman who doesn't get treatment, may have a stillbirth (baby born dead) or have a baby born with severe physical and mental health problems.

-OVER-

What you should know about Syphilis

What about syphilis and HIV?

A person with syphilis is at higher risk for HIV. The sore can provide an entry point for HIV and other STDs. When you get tested for syphilis, you should also get tested for HIV and other STDs.

Syphilis can be cured!

Syphilis can be cured with medicine given by a doctor. Since you can have more than one STD at a time, you may have to take more than one drug at a time.

If you have syphilis or any other STD:

- Take all the pills your doctor prescribes
- Follow your doctor's advice
- Call your doctor's office right away if the medicine gives you problems
- Tell your sex partner(s) to get tested or have your local STD clinic tell them
- Don't have sex again until a doctor says you and your partner(s) are cured
- Don't try to treat yourself
- Don't share your pills

Get tested for syphilis if:

- You or your sex partner(s) have symptoms
- You have had more than one sex partner, male or female (the more partners you have, the greater your risk)
- Your partner tells you that he or she has been tested or treated for an STD
- You have any other STDs
- You have had sex without a condom

How can you stay healthy?

- The only sure way to avoid syphilis and other STDs is to **not have sex.** Vaginal, oral, and anal sex can all pass the disease.
- If you choose to have sex, **use a latex condom every time.** When used the right way, condoms can help keep you from getting an STD. Be sure to put the condom on before the penis touches the vagina, mouth or anus. Keep in mind that condoms may not protect you if an STD occurs on a part of the body not covered by the condom.
- If you choose to have sex, **stay with one partner who only has sex with you.** Use condoms unless tests show you and your partner do not have any STDs.

For HIV/STD testing locations in Texas, call: 2-1-1

For other HIV/STD questions, call:
1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Español)
1 (888) 232-6348 (TTY)

For more information, go to: www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd

DSHS TB/HIV/STD Unit
DSHS Stock E13-11914
Revised 5/2008