



SYPHILIS: ON THE RISE

The Facts:

- Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that, when left untreated, can progress to a late stage that causes serious health problems. The infection alternates with periods of being active and inactive (latent). When the infection is active, symptoms occur. But when the infection is latent, no symptoms appear even though you still have syphilis.
- Syphilis is caused by a type of bacterium that usually enters the body through the mucous membranes. An infected person is contagious whenever a sore or a rash is present.
- Symptoms of syphilis may not be noticed or may mimic those of many other diseases. This may cause an infected person to delay seeking medical care and can make diagnosis difficult.
- If not treated, syphilis may linger and may progress to the late stage where more serious health problems, such as blindness, heart disorders, mental disorders, nervous system problems, and even death.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. We didn't even have sex, so I can't have syphilis right?
 - You don't have to have sexual intercourse to get syphilis — anyone who comes into close skin-to-skin contact with a person who has syphilis can develop syphilis. Exposure can result from close contact with an infected person's genitals, mouth, or rectum.
2. But I don't have any symptoms, why should I get tested?
 - You can't always rely on symptoms to tell you that you have syphilis. Regular testing every 3 to 6 months is the only way to be sure.
3. I already do regular blood work; wouldn't they have caught it already if I had it?
 - Not all doctors include syphilis in routine blood work. The only way to be sure you're getting tested is to ask for it specifically. If you're comfortable, talk to your doctor about adding it to your routine blood work.
4. I'm not comfortable talking to my doctor about this, where can I go?
 - In BC there are many places to get tested for syphilis other than your regular doctor. Check out, <http://smartsexresource.com/get-tested/clinic-finder> to learn where.
 - Or if you have any other questions, to speak with a public health nurse about syphilis and testing, please call the BCCDC at **604.707.5603**
5. How do I get treated for syphilis once I have it?
 - If diagnosed early, syphilis can be cured with antibiotics. While antibiotic treatment cannot reverse the damage caused by the complications of late-stage syphilis, it can prevent further complications in this stage.