

# The DC Health and Wellness Center

## Questions? Want to get tested?

Call us to make an appointment  
or walk in and see us



### Sexual health services for everyone in DC

The DC Health and Wellness Center provides confidential, comprehensive sexual health services to everyone who lives, works, or plays in DC.

**Services are provided at low or no cost.** These include: sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, diagnosis, and treatment; PrEP; PEP; contraception; vaccines; rapid ART (HIV treatment); and mental health counseling.



202-741-7692



[dchealthandwellness.org](http://dchealthandwellness.org)



77 P Street NE  
Washington, DC 20002



**Clinic Hours:**  
Mon Tue Wed & Fri: 9:00am-3:00pm  
Thurs: 9:00am-11:30am only

## Syphilis

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by *Treponema pallidum* bacteria. You can get syphilis from vaginal, anal, or oral sex. It can also be passed from mother to baby at birth. Syphilis can show up in different ways depending on what stage of the infection you are in. Some people may not even know they have an infection.



## Symptoms and Complications

### Stages of syphilis

- **Primary:** Three (3) days to three (3) months after you are initially infected with syphilis, you may get sores (called "chancres") wherever your body came into contact with the bacteria (e.g., genitals, anus, mouth). These sores usually are not painful, but they are extremely infectious and can easily spread the infection to another person.
- **Secondary:** One (1) to three (3) months after infection, you may get a rash, often on the palms of your hands or the soles of your feet. Some people feel tired, have swollen lymph nodes, and/or have a fever.
- **Latent:** The infection is asleep in your body and symptoms go away.
- **Tertiary:** One (1) to ten (10) years after initial infection, the disease spreads to internal organs (e.g., brain, heart, eyes). This stage is very serious, but treatment during earlier stages can prevent this.

Syphilis can be spread from mother to baby during pregnancy. It can cause the baby to get very sick or even die. **If you are pregnant, you should be tested for syphilis at least twice during your pregnancy.** If you test positive, you can be treated during pregnancy to reduce the risk of spreading it to your baby.



## Testing

### Screening

- Screening means getting tested when you don't have symptoms, just to be sure of your status.
- Men who have sex with men (MSM) as well as all people who are pregnant, living with HIV, and/or taking PrEP should be tested for syphilis.
- You should also be tested for syphilis if your sex partner has recently tested positive, or if you are concerned about other STIs.

### Testing

- Your clinician will draw a small amount of blood to test for syphilis.
- If your test is positive, your clinician will do another test to confirm the results.
- You may also have another test after you finish your treatment to see if the infection is gone.
- Your test results will have a number called a titer. Your clinician will use this number to determine whether the syphilis infection has been cleared from your body.
- If you are in the Latent or Tertiary stage, you may need additional testing.



## Treatment and Prevention

### Syphilis Treatment

- Antibiotics can cure syphilis.
- Clinicians usually prescribe penicillin for syphilis. The penicillin must be given as a shot.
- If you are allergic to penicillin, your clinician will use different antibiotics.
- The number of shots you need will depend on which stage of the infection you are in.
- You will need to be tested again three (3) months after your treatment.
- **Treatment does not prevent you from being reinfected with syphilis.**

### Prevention Tips

- Tell your partners to get tested. If your partners have syphilis and don't get treated, they can pass the infection back to you, or on to someone else.
- Use condoms or dental dams - they are very good at preventing syphilis.
- Avoid sex until all of your sores have healed and you and your partner(s) have completed your treatment.