

Sexually Transmitted Diseases/Infections

Syphilis

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. It has often been called "the great imitator" because so many of the signs and symptoms are indistinguishable from those of other diseases.

Transmission of syphilis occurs in persons with sores, who are in the primary or secondary stage. Syphilis is passed from person to person through direct contact with a syphilis sore. Sores occur mainly on the external genitals, vagina, or anus, or in the rectum. Sores also can occur on the lips and in the mouth. Transmission of the organism occurs during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Pregnant women with the disease can pass it to the babies they are carrying. *(Contracting syphilis during pregnancy increases the risk of delivering a low-birth-weight baby, premature delivery, or stillbirth. Without prompt treatment, serious complications may arise within weeks. These complications include cataracts, deafness, seizures, and even death.)* Syphilis cannot be spread through contact with toilet seats, doorknobs, swimming pools, hot tubs, bathtubs, shared clothing or eating utensils.

Many people infected with syphilis do not have any symptoms for years yet remain at risk for late complications if they are not treated.

For more information:

- CDC facts, <https://www.cdc.gov/syphilis/about/>
- CDC STI Treatment Guidelines – Syphilis, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/syphilis.htm>