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Syphilis Makes A Stealthy Comeback

In the United States, rates of syphilis have been rising each year since 2000. This is particularly true for men who have sex with men (MSM), mainly those living in Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, southern California, Miami and New York City.

Twenty to 70 percent of people infected with syphilis also have human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS. It's no accident that these two STDs frequently coexist. Early syphilis causes sores on the mucosal surfaces of the genitals and mouth, creating an easy route for catching as well as transmitting HIV. If either you or your partner has a genital rash or sore, you'll both be safer if you let the skin heal before having sex.

In the primary stage of syphilis, about 10 days to three months after exposure, a small, firm, painless sore (chancre, pronounced SHANG-ker) appears on the part of your body where the bacteria entered, usually your genitals, rectum, tongue or lips. A single chancre is typical, but you may have multiple sores. Chancres go away without treatment, but you still have the infection.

The secondary stage of syphilis occurs two to 10 weeks after the chancre appears. In this stage, you develop multiple flulike symptoms, along with a rash and wartlike sores in the genital area or mouth. You may have secondary syphilis in a single episode lasting a few weeks, or the signs and symptoms may come and go for as long as a year.

Next, the infection may enter a latent or hidden stage in which all symptoms often go away. This stage can last for years.

Without treatment, syphilis progresses to the tertiary stage in 15 to 30 percent of those infected. Tertiary syphilis may permanently damage your brain, nerves, eyes, heart, liver, bones and joints.

Fortunately, penicillin cures syphilis at any stage. The sooner you get treated, the simpler it will be to get rid of the infection.

Want to know more about syphilis? Enter "syphilis" in the search box under the blue bar across the top of this page to find detailed information. Free [Medical Advice](#) published By [Dr Vivienne Balonwu](#).

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