

Patient information from BMJ

Last published: Dec 16, 2020

Syphilis screening

Syphilis is an infection that can be passed from person to person during sex. Antibiotics work well to cure the infection. But syphilis that's left untreated can cause severe health problems.

Many people with syphilis don't know they have the infection, as they may not have any symptoms. As a result, doctors often recommend that people be tested for syphilis if they have an increased chance of being infected. This is called **screening**.

People offered screening may include:

- people who have more than one sex partner
- people who have another sexually transmitted infection (STI), such as herpes, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, or HIV. People with HIV have an especially high chance of being infected with syphilis
- men who have sex with men
- people who use recreational ('street') drugs
- sex workers.

In some countries, anyone visiting a sexual health clinic will be tested for syphilis.

And in many countries all pregnant women are tested at their first pregnancy appointment, and sometimes later in their pregnancy as well.

If a pregnant woman tests positive for syphilis, treatment can cure the infection both in the woman and in her unborn baby. This can reduce the chance of problems from the infection after the baby is born, and of the baby being miscarried or stillborn.

You will also be tested for syphilis when you donate blood. This is because the infection can be passed on through blood transfusions and other treatments that use donated blood.

Screening for syphilis is done through a blood test. A sample of blood will be taken from your arm. This blood will then be tested for signs of the infection. If this test suggests that you have syphilis, you will have further tests to confirm whether you have the infection.

Syphilis screening

To learn more about syphilis, see the leaflets *Syphilis: what is it?* and *Syphilis: how is it diagnosed and treated?*.

The patient information from *BMJ Best Practice* is regularly updated. The most recent version of Best Practice can be found at bestpractice.bmj.com. This information is intended for use by health professionals. It is not a substitute for medical advice. It is strongly recommended that you independently verify any interpretation of this material and, if you have a medical problem, see your doctor.

Please see BMJ's full terms of use at: bmj.com/company/legal-information. BMJ does not make any representations, conditions, warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, that this material is accurate, complete, up-to-date or fit for any particular purposes.

© BMJ Publishing Group Ltd 2024. All rights reserved.

What did you think about this patient information guide?

Complete the [online survey](#) or scan the QR code to help us to ensure our content is of the highest quality and relevant for patients. The survey is anonymous and will take around 5 minutes to complete.



BMJ Group