

INFORMATION FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE ON SYPHILIS

There is an ongoing outbreak of the sexually transmissible infection (STI) syphilis affecting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Learn more about syphilis and how to protect you and your community.

WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is an infection that is passed from one person to another during sexual activity. It can cause serious health issues if left untreated.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, syphilis occurs most often in young people aged between 15 and 34 years.

YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW YOU HAVE SYPHILIS

Not everyone who has syphilis has symptoms, so people often don't realise they have it. That's why it's important for you and any sexual partner you have to get tested regularly for STIs like syphilis – even if you have no symptoms.

SYPHILIS SYMPTOMS VARY FROM PERSON TO PERSON

For those who do get symptoms of syphilis, the first sign is one or more sores or ulcers at the site of the

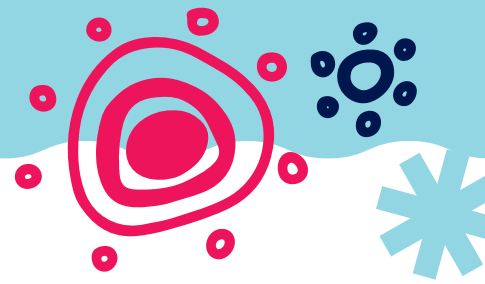
infection (genitals and mouth). Over time this can develop into rashes, skin lesions, swollen lymph nodes, hair loss, muscle and joint aches, headaches and fatigue.

Without treatment, syphilis can cause brain infections, dementia, lung and heart failure, blindness and death.

PASSING SYPHILIS ONTO A BABY IS DANGEROUS

Untreated syphilis during pregnancy can lead to the mother passing the infection to her baby before birth. This is known as congenital syphilis and can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, premature births, low birth weight and death of the baby shortly after birth.

A baby with congenital syphilis can also experience serious health issues that affect their growth and development, such as permanent organ and brain damage. Some babies won't show symptoms until they are older, which can lead to a delay in diagnosis.



GETTING A REGULAR TEST CAN HELP YOU

If you live in an area where there is a syphilis outbreak and are sexually active, you should get tested regularly even if you don't have symptoms. See your local doctor or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker to assess your risk of contracting syphilis and ask about getting tested.

If you are pregnant and live in an area where there is a syphilis outbreak, you should get tested at your first antenatal visit, at 28 and 36 weeks, when your baby is born, and six weeks after birth. Your sexual partner(s) should also consider getting tested to prevent transmission during pregnancy.

ARE YOU IN AN OUTBREAK AREA?

To find out whether you live in an outbreak area, go to health.gov.au and search "syphilis outbreak".

PRACTISING SAFE SEX

The best way to prevent syphilis is to practise safe sex:

- Always use condoms with water-based lubricant during vaginal and anal sex.
- Always use condoms or dental dams during oral sex.
- Avoid sexual activity if you or your sexual partner is unwell, especially if they have symptoms of syphilis. This includes rashes, skin lesions, swollen lymph nodes, hair loss, muscle and joint aches, headaches and fatigue.
- Get tested regularly.

If you have syphilis, you should avoid sex or close sexual contact with another person until you have finished your treatment. If you have sex during treatment, you could catch syphilis again or pass it on to your sexual partner.



For more information
about syphilis go to

health.gov.au/syphilis



Australian Government
Department of Health

