Syphilis, Females and Males

Syphilis is an infection caused by a type of spirochete called treponema pallidum. This is similar to a germ or *bacterial* (germ) infection. The spread usually occurs from sexual contact. It is passed through minor cuts or scrapes in the skin or mucous membranes. Syphilis can be treated with medications that kill germs (*antibiotics*). It is necessary that all sexual partners also be treated. This infection may also be passed to the unborn baby through the blood of the infected mother. This is very serious and can cause deformities and death in the newborn.

SYPHILIS HAS THREE STAGES:

- The **first** stage (primary) presents as painless sores (chancre) on the:
  - Genitals.
  - Rectum.
  - Tongue.
  - Lips.
  - There may be swelling in the lymph nodes (glands) in the groin. These can disappear even if you are not treated, but you will still have the infection.
- The **secondary** stage presents as a rash or sores over any portion of the body. It occurs more often on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. There may be:
  - Fever.
  - Headache.
  - Aching bones.
  - Sores in the mouth.
  - These symptoms can also disappear with no treatment but you will still have the infection.
- The **third** stage of this illness may have no symptoms but consists of an infection throughout the entire body and may be fatal. In the third stage you may have:
  - Brain damage.
  - Meningitis.
  - Heart problems.
  - Develop an aneurysm (an enlargement) of the aorta.

DIAGNOSIS:

- Examination will show a painless sore and swollen lymph glands in the groin.
- Blood tests can help.
- Culture of the sores.
- Spinal fluid to detect brain damage or meningitis.
- X-rays, CT scans, MRI or ultrasound to detect heart and aorta disease.

TREATMENT:

Antibiotics. During the first day of your treatment you may develop:

- Fever, chills.
- Headache.
- Nausea.
- Aching all over your body. This is a normal reaction to all the syphilis organisms dying.

Notify your sex partner to be tested and treated if necessary.

OTHER FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- Syphilis can be cured if the diagnosis is made early and the correct antibiotic is given.
- In the early stages it can be cured with antibiotics.
- **Do not engage in sexual activity** until you have had at least two blood tests saying the infection is cured.

Blood tests should be continued for at least one year. The first two stages are the most dangerous for passing the disease to another person.

- This is a sexually transmitted infection. You are also at risk for other sexually transmitted infections. These include:
  - Chlamydia.
  - Gonorrhea.
  - Trichomonas.
  - Human papilloma virus and HIV (AIDS).
- Testing may be done for other sexually transmitted infections if one infection is detected.
- If you are pregnant and have syphilis and not treated, it can cause deformities and death to the baby. The baby should be treated with antibiotics after delivery even if the mother was treated when pregnant.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU:

- **Finish all medication as prescribed.** Incomplete treatment will put you at risk for continued infection and possibly death. If one sexually transmitted infection is discovered, often treatment will be started to cover other possible infections.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Rest and eat a balanced diet with plenty of fluids.
- **Do not have sex until treatment is completed or as instructed by your caregiver.** Follow up at your caregiver's office or the clinic you were referred. If your diagnosis is confirmed by culture or other method of testing, your recent sexual partners will need treatment even if they are symptom free or have a negative culture or exam.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a fever 100º F (37.8º C) or higher.
- You develop pelvic pain.
- You develop severe headache.
- You develop shortness of breath.
- You develop chest pain.

For the protection of your privacy, test results can not be given over the phone. Make sure you receive the results of your test. Ask as to how these results are to be obtained if you have not been informed. **It is your responsibility to obtain your test results.**

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