

Syphilis Encyclopedia Article

Syphilis

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Syphilis

A sexually transmitted disease that, if untreated, can cause permanent damage to the heart and central nervous system.

Syphilis is a **sexually transmitted disease** (STDs) caused by an organism called *Treponema pallidum*. The incidence of syphilis among adolescents has risen dramatically in recent years, yet because most adolescents infected with syphilis have no symptoms, the growing nature of the problem is not obvious. Syphilis is spread by sexual intercourse, by kissing, and by touching infected sores. Left untreated, syphilis can cause serious permanent damage to the **heart** and to the central nervous system. For these reasons, all sexually active adolescents should be routinely screened for syphilis with a blood test called VDRL or **RPR**.

At the onset of infection, a painless sore called a chancre sometimes appears, usually in the genital area. If an adolescent infected with syphilis develops a chancre, it will disappear in a few weeks even without treatment. The disease, however, will continue to progress.

Syphilis is treated with penicillin or another **antibiotic**, either injected or by mouth. All sexual partners should also be tested for syphilis, and an adolescent being treated for syphilis should abstain from sexual activity. Follow-up blood tests should be performed every three months to confirm that the cure is complete.

For Further Study

Organizations

National Sexually Transmitted Disease Hotline
Telephone: toll-free (800) 227-8922
(Free information and clinic referrals)

Books

Daugirdas, John T., M.D.

STD, Sexually Transmitted Diseases,

Including HIV/AIDS.

Hinsdale, IL: Medtext, 1992.