

ACT

AIDS Committee of Toronto

For more info on syphilis and where to get tested call:
AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline: 416-392-2437 or 1-800-668-2437
Hassle Free Men's Clinic: 416-922-0603
or visit: www.actoronto.org/syphilis

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LOOK WHAT'S BACK

Syphilis is making a comeback. Since the '70's it's been rare among gay men but there have been recent outbreaks in Toronto. If you are a sexually active gay or bisexual man, learn more about syphilis and get tested.

What is syphilis?

It's an infection that's easily passed on during sex. It's serious because if it's not treated it can damage your heart, brain and other parts of your body.

Who is at risk from syphilis?

Anyone could get syphilis, but you're most at risk:

- ★if you have anal sex (fuck or get fucked) without a condom
- ★if you have oral sex (suck cock or get sucked) without a condom
- ★if you do the above and have HIV/AIDS



Most people with syphilis get sores and maybe a rash. Syphilis is passed on when these are touched during sex. The most common ways this happens are during:

★ **fucking and being fucked** ★ **sucking and being sucked**

Using condoms makes it less likely you'll get syphilis when fucking, but sucking can pass on the infection too. **A lot of men have caught syphilis from sucking.** Fingering, rimming, fisting, jerking someone off and kissing could also pass syphilis on.

What are the symptoms of syphilis?

Syphilis goes through 3 stages, but it's possible to get it and have no symptoms.

This is what normally happens when syphilis isn't treated.

First stage (*primary syphilis*)

A few weeks after getting infected most people get a sore, usually on their cock, ass or in their mouth. It can look like a boil or ulcer but you may not notice it if it's inside your ass or throat. The sore will heal on its own. You may get swollen glands too.

Second stage (*secondary syphilis*)

Usually a few weeks later a rash comes. This can be on the palms of your hands, soles of your feet or on other parts of your body. This rash will clear up too. You might also get sores in your mouth or on your cock, which look like ulcers. And around your ass you can get warty growths. You may feel flu-like symptoms, with aching joints and swollen glands. Some people get patchy hair loss.

Third stage (*tertiary syphilis*)

Over the next few years there'll be no signs anything is wrong but your heart, brain, eyes, bones, liver and nervous system can all be damaged. Most people with syphilis have it spotted and treated before this stage. **You might ignore the sores and rash, especially as they go away but you still have syphilis and can give it to others.**



How do I know if I have syphilis?

The usual test is a blood test. You can get this test at a sexual health clinic or a doctor, or by calling Hassle Free Men's Clinic. For more information about where to get tested, see the back of this pamphlet.

What if I have HIV/AIDS?

A lot of men getting syphilis also have HIV. Like all men, the kind of sex you have affects your risk for syphilis. For some men with HIV/AIDS a weakened immune system can make it more likely you'll pick up syphilis.

Having HIV can mean the symptoms of syphilis are more severe and it can take longer to treat. Your HIV viral load can go up as your body tries to fight both HIV and syphilis, putting your immune system under more strain. This could also make it easier for you to pass on HIV.

Syphilis symptoms may be mistaken as something to do with having HIV and your HIV clinic might not check for sexually transmitted infections during your regular check-ups. So if you have HIV/AIDS and are sexually active, get tested for syphilis especially if you've not had one in the last 6 months.