



Syphilis FAQs

How would I know if I have syphilis?

It is common for someone to have syphilis and not know it.

Getting a blood test is the easiest way to know for sure if you have syphilis. Testing in the NWT is free and confidential.

You can contact your local Public Health Office in larger communities or your Community Health Centre to get tested.

Can syphilis be spread by people who don't know they are infected?

Yes. A lot of people believe that just because they have oral or anal sex that they are practicing safer sex. Syphilis spreads easily through any kind of sexual contact.

How would I get infected or infect someone else with syphilis?

People get infected by having unprotected sex (anal, oral or genital) with someone who has the infection.

Pregnant women can also pass syphilis to an unborn child resulting in stillbirth, pre-term birth, and abnormalities in the baby.

What are the symptoms?

If not treated, syphilis goes through four stages:

- In the first stage, a painless sore appears where the bacteria first entered the body (e.g. rectum, penis, vagina, mouth).
- In the secondary stage, a rash develops on the palms of the hand, soles of the feet or other body areas.

- In the third stage, there are no symptoms.
- In the fourth stage, the brain, nervous system, blood vessels, heart, bones, and eyes may be affected.

If left untreated, syphilis can lead to death.

What can I do to protect myself or others from getting infected?

- If you are sexually active, practice safer sex by wearing a condom or using a dental dam.
- The behaviors that put you at risk for one infection (not using condoms, multiple partners, anonymous partners) also put you at risk for other infections such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, and HIV.
- Tell your partner(s) if you have become infected with syphilis so they can get tested and treated.
- Avoid sexual contact if you have symptoms of a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or are being treated for an STI.
- Avoid sexual contact with anyone who has symptoms of an STI or who may have been exposed to an STI.
- Talk about this important health issue with partners, family, and friends.

What is the Government of the Northwest Territories doing?

Actions include the following:

- Providing timely access to clinical advice, testing and treatment as well as targeted education and awareness work especially related to safer sex practices.
- Identifying and addressing underlying issues, such as poor mental health, alcohol and drug use, sexual violence and bullying as these are significant factors contributing to sexual health issues.
- Working with communities to improve clinical case management and prevention/promotion activities for high-risk groups such as young adults.

- Updating the NWT's school health curriculum.