

Syphilis information for communities



First Nations
Health Authority
Health through wellness

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is an infection caused by a germ (bacteria).

- It usually starts with a sore on the genitals, mouth or anus
- If not treated, syphilis can get very serious over time
- **It can be cured with timely treatment**



sexual activity

oral, vaginal or anal sex or intimate contact with a sore

How
syphilis
is passed



during pregnancy

from a pregnant person to their baby

What does it do?

Syphilis often has no symptoms. It can stay in the body for a long time.

- If there are symptoms, it usually starts with a painless sore, then fever and body rashes
- Over time, it can cause serious problems in our organs:



brain



heart



eyes



ears



skin



bones

- It can lead to loss of sight, memory, movement and even life, if not treated



Syphilis in pregnancy:

- can pass from the pregnant person to the baby **before birth or during delivery**
- may lead to **miscarriage or stillbirth**

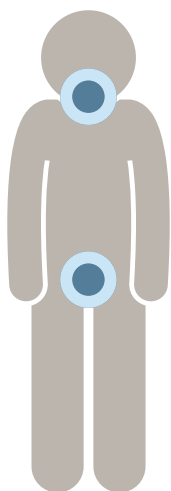


The stages of syphilis

Knowing the signs and symptoms of syphilis helps protect community members.

Syphilis can show up in 4 stages. It passes most easily in stages 1 and 2:

1 PRIMARY

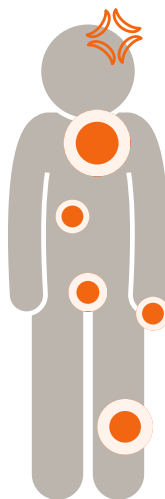


Sore

Within 3 days - 3 months

- A **small sore** may appear on the genitals, mouth, or anus
- It doesn't hurt
- It might go away on its own in a few weeks

2 SECONDARY



Signs

Within 2 weeks - 3 months

After the sore heals, more signs may show up:

- **Body rash:** Mostly on the chest, belly, hands, feet and genitals
- **Other signs:** Fever, headache, hair loss, bumps in the mouth, genitals or anus
- These may come and go

If syphilis is not treated, it can progress to stages 3 and 4:

3 LATENT

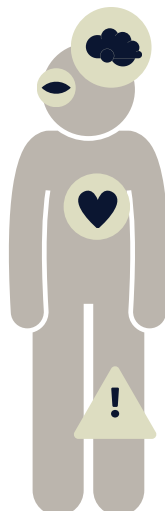


Silent

Can last years

- Stays "hidden" in the body with **no symptoms**
- Can also happen between stage 1 and 2
- You may still pass the infection in the first 12 months or if symptoms come back

4 TERTIARY



Serious

Many years or decades later

- Can affect the **heart, brain, eyes, ears, skin or bones.**
- May lead to loss of sight, memory, movement or even death
- Does not usually pass to others
- Most people do **not** get to this stage, but some do

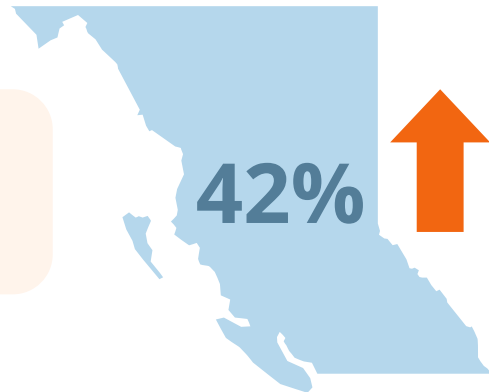
Syphilis is treatable at any stage.

Syphilis numbers in BC

**Syphilis was once almost gone from BC.
Now, many more people are living with syphilis.**

Syphilis is rising

Between 2019 and 2025, BC saw a **42% increase in people with syphilis.**



In 2025 in BC:



1500

Around 1,500 people were reported to have **syphilis**.



51

51 people had syphilis that affected their **brain or eyes**.



47

47 **pregnant people** had syphilis.

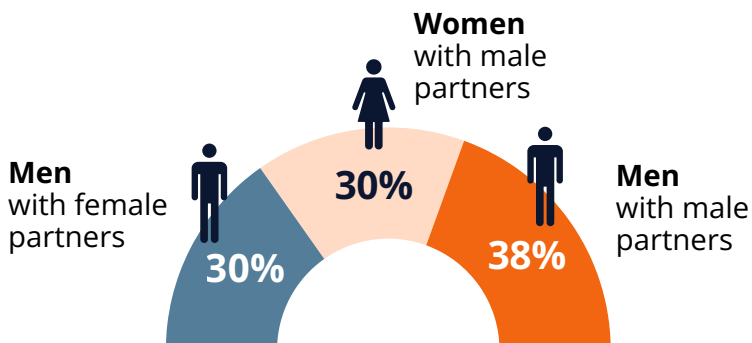


22

22 **babies** were born with syphilis.

Anyone can get syphilis

Syphilis can affect people of all ages, genders and sexual orientations who are sexually active.



We can reduce syphilis in our communities.

90%

Around 90% of people got **treatment** within 30 days of diagnosis in 2025.

With testing, treatment and taking care of our whole health, we can keep our communities well.

See pages 4 and 5 for information on preventing and healing from syphilis.

How to prevent syphilis

Early action is the key to protecting yourself and your partner(s).

Test regularly



Test for syphilis: It's a simple, private blood test. May include a swab of any sores.

When to test:

If you have new or multiple partners	Every 3 - 6 months
If you have symptoms or a partner has syphilis	As soon as possible
If pregnant	Part of pregnancy care access as early as possible

Where to test:



Your community health centre



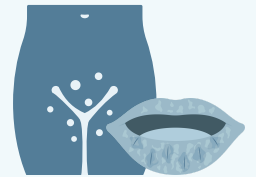
A sexual health clinic
Find one near you:
smartsexresource.com



Online
A free service in some communities:
getcheckedonline.com

Know the symptoms:

- A painless sore, often in genitals, anus, or mouth
- Skin rashes, often on hands or feet
- Fever, sore throat, tiredness



Syphilis often has no symptoms, so testing may be the only way to know.

Practice safer sex

Use condoms

Correctly use condoms or dental dams during sex, including oral sex.

Do not have sex if you or your partner have sores in the genital area.

Talk to your partner(s)

If you feel safe, have an open conversation with your partner(s) about using protection and STI testing.



Making beaded condom cases

This can be a great way to talk about sex and sexuality in a culturally safe way - An initiative led by the [Native Youth Sexual Health Network](#)



Caring for your sexual health helps protect your body, mind, and spirit.

Talk to a trusted care provider or call 8-1-1 if you have any questions.



More on syphilis and testing:
smartsexresource.com/syphilis/



More safer sex and conversation tips:
healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/safer-sex

Healing from syphilis

Physical, mental and spiritual supports are all important ways to heal from syphilis.

Treatment for syphilis

Syphilis is curable:

- Usually treated with **antibiotics**
- It's important to **complete all doses** as prescribed to fully cure infection
- Treatment depends on the stage of infection
- Talk to a health care provider about your care plan

If you have syphilis:

- **Let your partner(s) know** so they can be tested and treated
- **Avoid sexual activity** until you are treated



Seeking treatment:

Syphilis in pregnancy resources:
linktr.ee/ridprogram



First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day:
Call 1-855-344-3800 to book an appointment.
fnha.ca/virtualdoctor

If you have experienced physical or sexual trauma, getting tested and treated can be especially difficult.

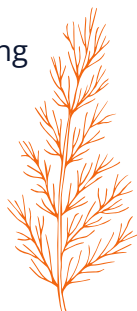
Salal Support Centre offers free programs for Indigenous survivors, including support circles, Elder support and ceremony: salalsvsc.ca

Caring for your mind, heart and spirit

Cultural and spiritual wellness

Traditional healing practices, like smudging or brushing, land-based activities, and connecting with Elders and Knowledge Keepers can support wellness.

Everyone's path is different - do what brings you comfort.



Tsow-Tun Le Lum Helping House cultural supports: 1-888-403-3123, tsowtunlelum.org

Emotional and social supports

A new illness can be scary. It can also be hard to care for yourself when other stressors are impacting your life and mental health.

Counsellors and community organizations can help support your journey.



Ku-Us Crisis Line 24/7 crisis and housing supports: 1-800-588-8717

Hope for Wellness help line for counselling: 1-855-242-3310
Online chat: hopeforwellness.ca



More information:

Health Canada - [Syphilis in Indigenous Communities](https://www.healthcanada.ca/syphilis)