



August:

STD Awareness Month

Syphilis Rates are on the Rise

Syphilis Strikes Back in the United States

You might be thinking: "Syphilis? That problem was solved a long time ago." Well, not exactly. At one point syphilis was almost eliminated, but that is not the case anymore. This persistent sexually transmitted disease (STD) is now on the rise again and it has reached a critical high: the current number and rate of cases is higher than it's been in more than 20 years. In 2015, there were close to 24,000 cases of syphilis reported in the U.S.—that was almost a 20% overall increase since 2014 alone. This rise in infections makes syphilis a renewed health threat for many.

If left untreated, syphilis can cause severe health problems affecting the brain, eyes, heart, and other organs. Having syphilis also makes it easier to get HIV. The good news is that syphilis is simple to cure with the right treatment.

"There's no way I could get syphilis."

The bottom line is this: if you're having sex, you can get syphilis. This resurgence highlights its ability to affect many communities at anytime and anywhere. Infection rates have spiked in all regions of the country, and across almost every race/ethnicity, and varying age groups from the oldest Gen Z'ers to younger baby boomers—and most troubling of all—babies. Some populations, such as gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM), and women are seeing higher increases than other groups of people.

Syphilis rates have risen among women 27% from 2014-2015, which has led to a surge in the number and rate of babies born with syphilis (congenital syphilis (<https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-congenital-syphilis.htm>)). Men, and especially gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) remain hardest-hit by syphilis, with data suggesting an average of half of MSM with syphilis are also living with HIV.

While syphilis may affect some populations more than others, the increase across all demographics is a development that needs attention. It means people from all walks of life—including those who think they have slim-to-zero chances of becoming infected—may be at risk, so protecting yourself is a must. Even if you do not think you have anything to worry about, it is better to be safe than sorry—and it's easy to get informed. So arm yourself with the facts (<https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-syphilis.htm>) about syphilis.

"How can I protect myself?"

The only way to avoid syphilis and other STDs is to not have vaginal, anal, or oral sex. However, if you are sexually active, you can do the following things to lower your chances of getting syphilis:

- Be in a long-term, monogamous relationship with a partner who's tested negative for syphilis and other STDs.
- Use latex condoms the right way (<https://www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/male-condom-use.html>) every time you have sex.
- Talk openly and honestly with your healthcare provider and ask what tests may be right for you. Check out CDC's overview of STD testing recommendations (<https://www.cdc.gov/std/prevention/screeningreccs.htm>) and find a testing location near you.
- If you test positive for syphilis, get treated right away and be sure your sexual partner is treated as well to reduce the risk of re-infection.

Know the facts about syphilis and what you can do to protect yourself.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/sam/index.htm>



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