

# Syphilis Screen

Syphilis is an infection caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum* and is most often spread by sexual contact. Syphilis testing screens for the presence of antibodies that combat the bacteria.

## How is the test performed?

An initial blood test is performed to look for antibodies the body produces to fight the infection. If antibodies are found, a second test, called a reflex test, is performed to confirm the antibodies specifically target the syphilis bacteria to rule out the possibility of a false positive.

## What are symptoms of syphilis?

Syphilis symptoms are divided into four stages; primary, secondary, latent and late syphilis.

**Primary** - During the primary stage, you may notice a single sore at the location where the syphilis entered your body. It is usually firm, round and painless and can easily go unnoticed. It lasts 3-6 weeks and heals whether you receive treatment or not, but you still need treatment or it will move into the secondary stage.

**Secondary** - In the secondary stage, you may have skin rashes and/or sores in your mouth, vagina (for women), or anus. This stage usually starts with a rash on one or more areas of your body and can look like rough, red or reddish-brown spots on the palms of your hands or bottoms of your feet. You may also experience fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches and fatigue. Like the primary stage, this symptoms will go away without treatment, but it will move into the latent stage without treatment.

**Latent** - The latent stage begins when symptoms disappear from the primary and secondary stages. Without treatment, you can continue to have syphilis in your body for years without any signs or symptoms.

**Late syphilis** - Most untreated people do not develop late syphilis, but it can be very serious and occurs 10-30 years after the infection began. Symptoms of late syphilis can include difficulty coordinating muscle movements, paralysis, numbness, blindness and dementia. Late stages of syphilis can damage organs and lead to death.

## Is syphilis curable?

Syphilis can be cured when treated with a course of antibiotics.

## What should I do if my results are positive or negative?

It is always recommended you meet with a healthcare provider to determine what your laboratory test results mean to you. Your healthcare provider will review all of your test results and, combined with your health history, will be able to provide an accurate picture of your health status.

**If your results were positive:** Since the syphilis test requires a reflex test for confirmation, a positive result confirms you are infected with syphilis.

**If your results were negative:** Negative results mean it is unlikely an infection is present, but it may take several weeks after exposure to the bacteria for antibodies to appear. Your healthcare provider may request additional testing.

## What other resources are available to learn more about my health and laboratory tests?

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)
- Lab Tests Online: [labtestsonline.org](http://labtestsonline.org)
- WebMD: [webmd.com](http://webmd.com)

*DLO Direct offers direct access to laboratory testing for informational purposes. A DLO Direct lab test result is not a medical diagnosis and is not intended as medical advice. Only a healthcare provider can interpret lab results and diagnose a medical condition or disease.*

*Because tests have not been ordered by a healthcare provider, third party entities, including Medicare and Medicaid, will not reimburse for these tests.*



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