

# SO YOU ARE A CONTACT OF SYPHILIS

## For the Patient

### WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacteria, *Treponema pallidum*. Syphilis is spread by unprotected anal, oral or vaginal sex. It can also be spread through intimate or skin to skin contact with an infected person. It is a very serious disease that can affect your central nervous system, brain and other organs. Because Syphilis can be very serious and it is possible to have Syphilis without experiencing any symptoms, it is important to test regularly and receive treatment and testing if you are a contact of Syphilis.

**Take this form with you to your GP.** There is more information below to help your GP test and treat you for a potential Syphilis infection.

## For the General Practitioner

Dear Doctor,

This patient has been notified as a contact of infectious syphilis.

Below is a guide for testing and treating contacts of Syphilis.

### Managing Contacts

Causative organism	<i>Treponema pallidum</i> .
Common symptoms	Anogenital or oral ulcers (generally painless). Maculopapular Rash. Early infection commonly asymptomatic.
Usual testing method	Serology for syphilis. Ulcer swab can be tested by nucleic acid amplification (PCR).
Usual management of contacts	Presumptively treat all sexual contacts of patients with primary or secondary syphilis regardless of serology. Contacts of early latent syphilis can also be treated presumptively, but if the contact was greater than 3 months previous, treatment can be given according to serology result. If the exposure was greater than 12 months ago and the patient has positive serology, treat as for late latent infection. People who were sexually exposed to a patient with primary, secondary, or early latent syphilis should be treated presumptively if serological test results are not available immediately and the opportunity for follow-up is uncertain. Discussion with a sexual health specialist is recommended for partners who are pregnant, have HIV co-infection or if the GP is uncertain on management.

## Managing Contacts...continued

### Testing for other infections

People who are contacts of Syphilis may also be at risk for other STIs, HIV and blood-borne virus. The following tests are also recommended for men who have sex with other men:

- Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea (throat/urine/anus).
- Hepatitis A, B and C serology.
- HIV serology (if HIV-negative).

## Treatment

### Primary, secondary and early latent syphilis (up to 24 months post probable infection):

Treatment	Benzathine benzylpenicillin 1.8 g intramuscularly, as a single dose
<i>If allergic to penicillin</i>	Doxycycline 100 mg orally, 12-hourly for 14 days.

### Late latent syphilis (more than 24 months post probable infection):

Treatment	Benzathine benzylpenicillin 1.8 g intramuscularly, once weekly for three doses. If treatment is missed for more than two weeks, must restart
<i>If allergic to penicillin</i>	Doxycycline 100 mg orally, 12-hourly for 28 days.

### Tertiary syphilis

Tertiary syphilis includes cardiovascular syphilis and neurosyphilis	Specialist advice should be sought
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Seek advice from a sexual health specialist for alternative treatments if necessary.

### Accessing Benzathine Benzylpenicillin

Patients may find it difficult to access Benzathine Benzylpenicillin (Bicillin-LA) from some community pharmacies. In general, pharmacists will be able to order Bicillin-LA for a patient and it be ready for collection the following day. However, greater delays may be experienced for patients in regional or remote areas. If a patient is unable to access the medication from a community pharmacy they should be referred to a public sexual health clinic for further management and treatment.

- Royal Perth Sexual Health Clinic  
Level 4, Ainslie House, Royal Perth Hospital,  
48 Murray St, Perth WA 6000. Phone: (08) 9224 2178
- South Terrace Sexual Health Clinic  
A Block, Fremantle Hospital, South Terrace,  
Fremantle WA 6160. Phone: (08) 9431 2149

The information in this guide is taken from the following sources. Please refer to these for more information. Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine Syphilis Contact Tracing Guidelines: <http://contacttracing.ashm.org.au/conditions/when-contact-tracing-is-recommended/syphilis>  
Department of Health, Western Australia Silver book – Guidelines for managing sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne viruses: <http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Silver-book/Notifiable-infections/Syphilis>  
This guide was produced by the Western Australian AIDS Council and Department of Health, Western Australia.