

# 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**     **Treponema pallidum.**

**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.

**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):

<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Benzathine benzylpenicillin 2.4 million IU intramuscularly, as a single dose</b>
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<b>If allergic to penicillin</b>	<b>Specialist advice should be sought<sup>1</sup>.</b>
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Late latent syphilis (more than 24 months post probable infection):

<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Benzathine benzylpenicillin 2.4 million IU intramuscularly, once weekly for three doses. If treatment is missed for more than two weeks, must restart</b>
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<b>If allergic to penicillin</b>	<b>Specialist advice should be sought<sup>1</sup>.</b>
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Tertiary syphilis:

<b>Tertiary syphilis includes cardiovascular syphilis and neurosyphilis</b>	<b>Specialist advice should be sought.</b>
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1. Ascertain if true penicillin allergy first. Please note: the effectiveness of penicillin for treating syphilis has been well established and treponemes have not developed penicillin resistance. There is little evidence showing the effectiveness of non-penicillin regimens, and they must be regarded as inferior to penicillin.

## ACCESSING BENZATHINE BENZYL PENICILLIN

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.

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

Alternatively, contact Metropolitan Communicable Disease Control (08 9222 8588 or [ContactMCDC@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:ContactMCDC@health.wa.gov.au)) to have them assist you in accessing a supply of Benzathine Benzylpenicillin, or your regional Public Health Unit

([https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A\\_E/Contact-details-for-population-public-health-units](https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Contact-details-for-population-public-health-units))

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 in collaboration with the Western Australian AIDS Council, M Clinic and the Department of Health, Western Australia.

