

What happens to my baby after birth?

If you needed treatment for syphilis in pregnancy, your baby will need to be examined by a specialist paediatric (baby) doctor after birth and have some blood tests taken. A very small number of babies may need to stay in hospital for antibiotic treatment.

The baby will be followed up for a few months after birth to ensure they stay healthy and well.

Is it safe to breastfeed my baby if I have a positive syphilis test?

Yes, you can breastfeed your baby.

Who needs to know I have syphilis?

It is important that, with your permission, all healthcare professionals involved in the care of you and your baby are aware of your diagnosis so that they can make sure you and your baby receive effective treatment.

Further information



Further information about syphilis can be found at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/antenatal-infectious-disease-screening



Details of sexual health or Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) clinics in Northern Ireland can be found at: www.sexualhealthni.info/genitourinary-medicine-gum-clinics



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Syphilis: what your positive screening result means



Your recent screening test has shown that you have an infection called syphilis.

This leaflet explains what syphilis is and what it means for your pregnancy and baby.

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a bacterial infection. It often goes unnoticed as signs and symptoms are not always obvious. If left untreated, syphilis is a serious condition which can progress through various stages that can last for weeks, months and even years and can result in serious health problems for you and your baby.

How is syphilis transmitted?

Syphilis can be passed to others by:

- having direct contact with a syphilitic chancre (sore), normally during unprotected sex
- sharing infected needles or equipment for drug use
- transmission from mother to baby during pregnancy or at birth.

Treatment in pregnancy

You will be referred to the sexual health clinic (also known as Genitourinary Medicine clinic) who will decide what treatment you may need.

Syphilis can be cured with antibiotic treatment and it is important to complete the full course of treatment.

Even if you have been treated for syphilis in the past, you can become reinfected and may need to be retreated.

The sexual health team will also recommend that your partner is tested and treated if necessary so that they do not reinfect you after your treatment. You will need to avoid sexual contact with your partner until you have both finished your treatment. If you change partner during pregnancy you may need to be retested. Ask your midwife or sexual health team about retesting if you are worried.

Protecting your baby

Having syphilis in pregnancy means that the infection can be passed on to your unborn baby at any time during pregnancy or birth, causing a condition known as congenital syphilis, which can have long-term effects for your baby.



Congenital syphilis is more likely to be passed on to your baby in the early stages of your infection and can increase your risk of having a miscarriage, stillbirth or premature birth.

Congenital syphilis can be prevented by having antibiotic treatment before your baby is born, and if necessary giving your baby antibiotic treatment after birth.

It is really important you attend the appointments at the sexual health clinic and receive your treatment as soon as possible after diagnosis to help prevent transmission of the infection to your baby.

Is the treatment for syphilis safe during pregnancy?

The antibiotic treatment (usually penicillin) is safe during pregnancy and will not harm your baby. If you are allergic to penicillin, the doctor will discuss alternative treatment with you. Sometimes if you have treatment when your syphilis infection is at an early stage, the treatment can cause a short-term reaction that may include a 'flu-like' illness which usually lasts a few days.

The best way to protect your baby is to complete the treatment.

How will I know if the treatment has worked?

The sexual health clinic will take further blood tests at various stages following your treatment to make sure the infection has cleared.

Your blood will also be checked after your baby is born.