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Qulliq is an Inuit oil lamp that heats our bodies to maintain a healthy immune system. Just like the qulliq, this website helps us understand, in Inuktitut, the importance of taking care of ourselves, our families and our communities. We discuss these health issues so that we can all learn more and seek help, especially when it is not easy to talk about.

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Introduction

- Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Untreated syphilis can lead to serious health problems. The good news is that syphilis can be cured with antibiotics.
- Syphilis is usually passed during sexual contact, including oral, vaginal and anal sex.
- Syphilis can also be passed from a pregnant person to a child during pregnancy or childbirth.
- There are ways to prevent getting or passing syphilis.
- The only way to know if you have syphilis is to get tested.

Read on for answers to common questions about syphilis.

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What is syphilis?

Syphilis is an STI caused by a kind of bacteria. Many people with syphilis do not notice any symptoms. Soon after a person gets syphilis, a small, painless sore may appear on, in or around the site of first exposure (penis, vagina, rectum or mouth). If the infection is left untreated, other symptoms may occur like rashes, headaches and hair

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loss but these usually disappear within the first few months.

Importantly, untreated syphilis stays in the body and can eventually damage the nervous system and organs, leading to serious health problems and potentially becoming life-threatening.

Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics. This prevents further damage and stops syphilis from being passed to others.

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How does someone get syphilis and how can this be prevented?

Syphilis is usually passed during sexual contact, including vaginal, frontal, anal and oral sex.

Syphilis is easily passed from a pregnant person to a child during pregnancy or childbirth.

Syphilis may also be passed when sharing equipment used to inject drugs, although this is very rare

There is no vaccine for syphilis so it's important to do what you can to prevent getting syphilis.

There are many ways to prevent syphilis:

- Use condoms the right way each time you have sex.
- Take doxycycline, an antibiotic you have to get from a healthcare provider (sometimes referred to as doxy-prevention).
- If you think you may have been exposed to syphilis, get tested and cured right away to prevent passing syphilis to your sex partner(s).

- If you inject drugs, avoid sharing by using new equipment every time you inject drugs.

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How do I know if I have syphilis?

Many people who have syphilis have no obvious symptoms. You can have syphilis and not know it.

The only way to know if you have syphilis is to get tested.

Ask a healthcare provider for a syphilis test. You may want to get tested for other infections at the same time, like HIV, gonorrhea, chlamydia, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

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Can syphilis be cured?

Syphilis can be cured! Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics with few, if any, side effects.

If you have syphilis, speak to a healthcare provider about your treatment options. The earlier the infection is treated and cured, the better it is for your health.

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Can I get syphilis again?

Having had syphilis does not make you

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immune. You can get syphilis again if you come in contact with it again.

The good news is that it can be treated and cured again.

Can you pass syphilis on to your baby?

Syphilis can be easily passed from a pregnant person to their child during pregnancy or childbirth. This is known as congenital syphilis. Congenital syphilis can result in miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn. Children born with syphilis can develop very serious health problems and developmental disorders.

If you are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant, get tested for syphilis. If you are at ongoing risk of syphilis, get tested throughout pregnancy. If you test positive, get treated right away to avoid passing syphilis to your baby.

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Where can I get syphilis services?

- Speak to a healthcare provider about syphilis.
- Find syphilis services in your area at https://whereto.catie.ca.