

GET THE
FACTS
SYPHILIS

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GETTING THE MESSAGE

*HEY MATE JUST BEEN TO THE DOCTOR AND IT LOOKS LIKE I'VE GOT GONORRHOEA, CHLAMYDIA OR AM NSU. SORRY TO TELL YOU THE BAD NEWS BUT THOUGHT I SHOULD LET YOU KNOW.
CHEERS JAMIE*

I didn't know if I'd given it to him or he'd given it to me, but that didn't matter. He had fucked me a few days before without a condom – we're both positive and had disclosed this to each other before we hooked up. I was on the tail end of a pretty big weekend with him, but I'd also fucked a lot of guys and been pretty piggy lately.

I didn't feel any different, any 'symptoms', but I don't know how you feel if you've got a poxy arse. I rang my doctor the same day and told him the deal and he took a swab from my butt and throat, got me to piss in a jar, and gave me a jab for gonorrhoea and tablets for chlamydia – and he did a blood test for syphilis just to be on the safe side.

Glad he told me. I probably won't see him again, but who knows? And I'd do the same for a fuck if it happens to me.

My doctor did a blood test for syphilis to be on the safe side.

SYPHILIS GET THE FACTS

You can have syphilis, and not even know you've got it. If you don't get it treated it can lead to a lot of health problems, especially if you're HIV positive.

And it's important to know syphilis is on the increase again. Here are some basic facts.

Knowing the facts can mean you can better protect yourself or get treated more quickly.

WHO IS MORE AT RISK TO GET IT?

Anyone can get syphilis, but men who have sex with men account for 90% of the cases of infectious syphilis in New South Wales. About half of these guys are HIV positive. So if you are HIV positive, sexually active, and fucking with men, it makes good sense to have a regular blood test (i.e. every three months) for syphilis.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE SYPHILIS?

You don't, for sure, unless you have a blood test. You might not notice any symptoms, or you might easily miss symptoms. Signs or symptoms of syphilis can include a small painless sore in your mouth, on your balls, dick and arse. They can also include swollen lymph glands, rashes, fever, sore throat, muscle aches and tiredness. Some of these symptoms may be mild and can come and go, or they can even go away completely. While symptoms can go away, this does not mean the infection has gone.

It can take up to three months after getting syphilis for it to show up in the blood test. If you have been infected with syphilis future blood tests will show up as positive – even if you've been successfully treated. A particular test is used to identify a new infection – as well as to see if treatment has worked.

Most positive guys have regular blood tests, but these don't always include a test for syphilis unless you ask your GP.

If you have recently had any other STI like gonorrhoea or chlamydia, you should ask your doctor for a syphilis test as well.

Get tested at the same time as your regular HIV check-up.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT IT?

If you don't use condoms when you fuck with other positive guys, then you need to test regularly for syphilis and other STIs.

What's more, syphilis (like some other STIs) can also be caught by sucking cock or being sucked.

Using a condom significantly reduces the risk of getting syphilis.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF SYPHILIS?

Syphilis can increase your viral load and decrease your CD4 count, and it can also increase the likelihood of passing on HIV to a negative partner. Syphilis may also progress more rapidly in positive guys and so regular testing is even more important for us. If left untreated, it can seriously damage our health (and can include damage to our heart, brain and nervous system).

Syphilis may progress more rapidly in positive guys and this makes regular testing even more important for us.



HOW IS IT TREATED?

Syphilis is treated with a course of antibiotics – which involves penicillin injections into your butt. You need to complete the treatment to be sure the infection is cleared up.

If someone tells you they have been diagnosed with syphilis and you have had sex with them in the last three months, you should talk to your doctor about syphilis treatment even if your blood test result is negative. You might still be developing syphilis, but have not yet shown a positive blood test for it, so the treatment can cure the infection and prevent you passing it on.

You shouldn't have sex until you have finished your treatment and you have tested clear for the infection.

Syphilis is treated with a course of antibiotics. You need to complete the treatment to be sure the infection is cleared up.

The earlier you find out, the easier syphilis is to treat.

IF YOU'VE HAD IT ONCE CAN YOU GET IT AGAIN?

Yes. You can be re-infected with syphilis, and recently, the number of re-infections has increased. HIV positive guys accounted for most of these. Remember you can be infected over and over again, even after you've been treated.

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WHERE CAN I GO FOR TESTING AND TREATMENT?

You can ask your GP or HIV doctor for a test when you have your regular blood tests done. If it makes you feel more comfortable, you can also go to a Sexual Health Clinic (which are free and you don't have to use your real name).

**For more information and a list of clinics
visit www.thedramadownunder.info
or call the Sexual Health Infoline
1800 451 624**

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