

Appointment line: 07768 921673.

Use this number to book appointments for any of the clinics. If your problem is urgent, we will do our best to help you be seen as soon as possible. If you have any questions please contact us to speak to a member of staff. If you leave a message we will return your call as soon as possible.

Your own GP – Your doctor should be able to help you if you have any sexual health concerns, or advise you where you can go.

Family Planning in Lanarkshire – 07789 928710
For details of your nearest family planning service

Lanarkshire HIV, AIDS and Hepatitis Centre
– 01236 712247 (24-hour answering service)

Sexual Health Line – 0800 567 123

This line gives advice on all sexually transmitted infections. Lines are open 24 hours. The call is free and the phone number will not appear on your landline bill. Mobile phone costs vary.

Gay & Lesbian Switchboard – 0141 847 0447
7pm to 10pm, www.sgls.co.uk

Equal – www.equalonline.co.uk

Sexual health information website for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community in the West of Scotland

If you are sexually active, sexual health clinics are happy to see you for a routine check-up, even if you are feeling well.

For more information, or other leaflets, contact:

Health Promotion Resource Library, First Floor,
Law House, Airdrie Road, Carluke ML8 5ER
Phone: 01698 377600 Fax: 01698 377726

www.lanarkshiresexualhealth.org

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Syphilis

Sexual Health Information



What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a complicated sexually transmitted infection that affects both men and women. It is caused by a bacterium called *Treponema pallidum*.

What happens if I have syphilis?

Syphilis affects the body in three different stages.

The first stage

(10 days to six weeks)

You will usually see one small, round, painless, red sore which heals itself after three to six weeks. You may not have a sore you can see, for example, it may be on the cervix or in the rectum (back passage). You might also notice swollen glands in the area near the sores. If syphilis is not treated, it will progress to the second stage.

The second stage

(one week to six months after the first stage)

It shows as a rash on your skin, particularly on the palms of your hands and soles of your feet, and also around your middle. You may also have swollen glands, headaches, aches and pains, fever and tiredness, and maybe lose some hair.

After the second stage there is a 'latent' period. This has no signs or symptoms, but the syphilis is still in the body and will show up in a blood test. If this is not treated, it can lead to a third stage, usually years later.

The third stage

It can begin to damage the brain, heart and other organs, and this may not show up for many years. The damage can be so bad that it can eventually cause death.

How is syphilis passed on?

Vaginal, anal and oral sex all pass on the infection, and it is easily spread when symptoms are present. Syphilis can be passed on from a pregnant mother to her baby at any stage of the pregnancy. The mother is most likely to be able to pass it to her baby if she has had the infection for four years or less. Beyond that time, it is still possible to pass on syphilis, but much less likely. Tests for syphilis are done routinely at antenatal clinics to prevent the infection being passed on. Tests are also done at blood transfusion centres, to make sure that syphilis is not passed on in blood.

Blood transfusions in some countries outwith the UK can pass on syphilis after it has stopped being infectious sexually.

Where can I get tested?

You can get a full sexual health check-up in a welcoming, confidential setting at a genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic. The staff are specially trained and very experienced in helping people who are concerned they may have an infection. The test for syphilis would involve taking a blood sample and perhaps a small sample from the affected area.

Can it be treated?

Yes, syphilis can be treated quickly and easily with antibiotics. It is important to go back to the clinic to check the infection is completely gone, and to make sure your partner is also treated so that they do not infect you again. Also, avoid sexual contact until you and your partner have got the all clear.

What if syphilis is left untreated?

The symptoms may go away by themselves, but syphilis will not go away without treatment. The complications would become more serious with each stage of the infection. You can also pass it on to other sexual partners.

How can I best prevent infection?

The best way to stay free from sexually transmitted infections is to practice safer sex. Using condoms and lubricant means more comfort and safety. Not using any, or not using enough lube can make condoms more likely to break or come off. If used correctly, 'regular thickness' condoms and lubricant can be just as safe for anal sex. Don't use the same condom for more than 45 minutes. Check the condom is okay regularly and apply more lube each time. Condoms come in all shapes and sizes - use the right one for you. Syphilis sores can sometimes be on areas not covered by the condom, or be hidden in the vagina, rectum or mouth, so take extra care.

If you have any questions about your sexual health, contact a GUM clinic or your family doctor, or read the other leaflets in this series.

'C' Card Scheme

You can get free condoms from over 75 outlets across Lanarkshire. Phone 01698 85 55 88 to find out where your nearest outlet is.

For more information, you could contact the Lanarkshire GUM clinics in Airdrie, Blantyre, Cumbernauld, East Kilbride and Motherwell. Phone: 07768 921673