

CONGENITAL SYPHILIS

WHAT IS CONGENITAL SYPHILIS?

Congenital syphilis is a syphilis infection passed from a pregnant person to their baby through pregnancy or childbirth. Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*. Cases of congenital syphilis have been increasing in recent years.

IF LEFT UNTREATED, CONGENITAL SYPHILIS CAN CAUSE:

- Birth defects such as deformed bones
- Blindness
- Hearing loss
- Severe anemia
- Jaundice
- Rash
- Enlarged liver
- Miscarriage
- Meningitis*
- Preterm birth
- Low birth weight
- Stillbirth
- Infant death

*Meningitis is an infection of the meninges, which are the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis requires immediate medical attention. It can be fatal.

SCREENING AND DIAGNOSIS

Congenital syphilis is **preventable!** To prevent transmission from mother to baby, it is important for pregnant persons to be tested for syphilis throughout pregnancy. Health experts recommend syphilis screening three times during pregnancy: at the first prenatal visit, during the third trimester, and at birth. Screening is done through a simple blood test.

To lower the risk of contracting STIs, including syphilis, always use condoms correctly. Before having sex with a new partner, ensure both of you are tested for syphilis. It's important to remember that having syphilis once doesn't provide immunity. If you have a new partner, make sure to get tested again.

Not all babies with congenital syphilis show symptoms immediately, making early screening for syphilis critical. Without prompt treatment, congenital syphilis can lead to severe health complications over time, including developmental delays, seizures, and even death.

TREATING BABIES WITH CONGENITAL SYPHILIS

Babies born with congenital syphilis must receive treatment immediately. The type and duration of antibiotic therapy depend on the baby's condition and the severity of the infection.

The baby's care team will develop a personalized treatment plan to ensure the best possible outcome.

SYPHILIS TREATMENT DURING PREGNANCY

Syphilis is treatable, but only with medical intervention. As a bacterial infection, it is treated with antibiotics prescribed by a healthcare provider. Most cases are effectively treated with penicillin, which is safe to use during pregnancy. Follow-up testing is important to confirm that the antibiotics were successful, and that the infection is no longer active. Early treatment during pregnancy can prevent further damage but cannot reverse harm that may have already occurred.

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