



I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SYPHILIS

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is an infection that can affect the skin, blood and brain. An infected person may find sores (known as chancres) or rashes on their genitals, hands or mouth during early stages. This is called primary syphilis. More rashes and other complications develop as the infection progresses through secondary and late stages. Syphilis is highly contagious in its early stages and can become a chronic, and possibly fatal, infection if left untreated.

What causes syphilis?

Treponema pallidum are a thin spiral bacteria (pictured), which can penetrate rapidly through the body and cause syphilis infection.

How is it spread?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection passed through direct contact with an infectious syphilis chancre. Some chancres are not obvious and a person may not recognise they have syphilis, but can still spread the infection.

Pregnant women with syphilis can also pass it to their baby, which can result in deafness or blindness. In rare cases, syphilis can be transmitted by blood transfusion from an infected donor.

Despite being easily prevented and treated, infection is on the rise.

Can syphilis infection be detected in blood donations?

Yes it can. The Blood Service performs mandatory infectious disease screening for syphilis on every donation used for the production of fresh blood components. If a donor tests positive, they are contacted and informed by our Medical Officers and advised to seek treatment.

Some donors have a positive result but do not have a syphilis infection. These are called 'false positive' reactions. Donors with false positive reactions can still donate plasma until the tests become negative.

What is the treatment for syphilis?

Despite the severe effect it can have if left untreated, syphilis can be cured with simple antibiotics such as penicillin. People infected with syphilis are prone to re-infection, even following successful treatment.

Report it

In all states and territories, syphilis is a legally notifiable infection reported to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System.

BLOOD FACT

Christopher Columbus brought more back to Europe than just tomatoes. His voyage to the Americas is believed by many to have imported syphilis to Europe.