

GET THE FACTS

SYPHILIS



GETTING THE MESSAGE

Hey mate just been to the doctor and it looks like I've got gonorrhoea. Thought I should let you know.

I thought oh shit... for about two seconds and then I thought it was good to know. 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 (so to speak) of a pretty big weekend with him, but I'd also fucked a lot of guys and been pretty piggy lately. And 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 usual doctor the same day. As expected, he was booked up, so I got an appointment with another doctor in the same practice. It was all cool. No dramas. I 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, if I've got his number.

Chris

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 fuck 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 WOULD YOU KNOW IF YOU HAD SYPHILIS?

The only way to really know if you have syphilis is to 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 usually include a test for syphilis unless you ask for it.

You need to specifically ask for a test for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and this includes syphilis.

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

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT IT?

Using a condom, while not a complete protection, significantly reduces the risk of getting syphilis.

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 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).

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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.

You need to complete the treatment to be sure the infection is cleared up.

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.whytest.org or call
the Sexual Health Infoline
1800 451 624**

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