

away before the infection is cured. Even if symptoms do go away, you should finish taking all of your medicine.

More complicated or advanced cases of PID may require hospitalisation. During hospitalisation, intravenous antibiotics are used and then the woman is transferred to oral antibiotics.

You may also be asked to provide the names of your sexual partners so that they may be checked for the germs that cause PID.

What about preventing PID?

Women can play an active role in protecting themselves from PID by taking the following steps:

- Signs of discharge with odour or bleeding between menstrual cycles could mean infection. Early treatment may prevent the development of PID.
- If used correctly and consistently, male latex condoms will prevent transmission of gonorrhoea and partially protect against chlamydial infection.

Syphilis

What is it?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by a bacterium called *Treponema pallidum*. The initial infection causes an ulcer at the site of infection; however, the bacteria move throughout the body, damaging many organs over time.

Medical experts describe the course of the disease by dividing it into four stages: primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary (late). An infected person who has not been treated may infect others during the first two stages, which usually last one to two years. In its late stages, untreated syphilis, although not contagious, can cause serious heart abnormalities, mental disorders, blindness, other neurological problems and death.

The bacteria spread from the initial ulcer of an infected person to the skin or mucous membranes of the genital area, the mouth or the anus of a sexual partner. It also can pass through broken skin on other parts of the body. The syphilis bacterium is very fragile, and the infection is almost always spread by sexual contact.

In addition, a pregnant woman with syphilis can pass the bacterium to her unborn child, who may be born with serious mental and physical problems as a result of this infection. But the most common way to get syphilis is to have sex with someone who has an active infection.

How is it treated?

Syphilis is usually treated with penicillin, administered by injection. Other antibiotics can be used for patients allergic to penicillin. A person usually can no longer transmit syphilis 24 hours after beginning therapy. Some people, however, do not respond to the usual doses of penicillin. Therefore, it is important that people being treated for syphilis have periodic blood tests to check that the infectious agent has been completely destroyed.

In all stages of syphilis, proper treatment will cure the disease, but in late syphilis, damage already done to body organs cannot be reversed.