Syphilis: what does my positive screening result mean?
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Your recent blood test shows that you have screened positive for syphilis.

Your result does not definitely mean you have active syphilis. The screening test may be positive because:

- you have syphilis that needs to be treated
- you have had syphilis in the past, which was successfully treated
- it is possible that the test may have given a false result

Syphilis is a bacterial infection carried in the blood. Most people with syphilis are well with no obvious symptoms or illness. However, it is a serious condition which, if left untreated, can result in stroke, paralysis, blindness and even death.

How did I become infected?

The bacteria can enter your body if you have close contact with an infected sore, normally during unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

It can also be passed:

- from a mother to her baby during pregnancy and birth
- from infected blood by sharing needles

Can I be treated?

Syphilis in the early stages can be cured. The earlier it is treated, the less chance there is that you will have serious complications and pass it on to your baby. Diagnosis will involve a full physical examination and further blood tests. The treatment for syphilis is one or more doses of antibiotics.

It is important to remember that even after successful treatment you can still be re-infected at any time.
How can I protect my baby?

Syphilis can pass from a mother to her baby during pregnancy. If left untreated it can result in miscarriage, stillbirth or the baby being born with serious medical problems.

Treating syphilis as early as possible in pregnancy gives the best chance of preventing babies from being infected.

Having syphilis does not mean that you need a caesarean section and you can still breastfeed your baby.

The specialist team in the genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic will decide if your baby needs any treatment after he/she is born.

Your baby will need to be examined by a baby doctor (neonatologist) following birth, and may need a blood test and antibiotics to prevent infection.

What happens next?

1. A specialist midwife will talk to you about your result and answer any questions you or your partner have.
2. An appointment will be made with a specialist doctor and team in the sexual health (genitourinary medicine) clinic.
3. The doctor will usually advise you to have tests for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including chlamydia and gonorrhoea.

It is important that you attend all your appointments during pregnancy to keep you fit and well and reduce the risk of your baby becoming infected.

Who needs to know I have syphilis?

It is important that everyone involved in your care is made aware of your result. This will enable them to ensure that you and your baby receive safe and effective treatment and care. Discuss this with your specialist team.

It is important that your sexual partner is tested for syphilis and treated if necessary to prevent the infection from being passed back to you. You will need to avoid all sexual and intimate contact with your partner until you have both finished treatment.

If you have had sexual partners in the past, or if you have other children, they may also need testing. Your specialist doctor and nurses can advise you and offer help in contacting partners.
Confidentiality

Your information will not be shared with anyone other than the professionals involved in your care, such as your family doctor and midwife, without your permission. The NHS collects information about you and your baby so as to monitor health trends and improve services and care. The NHS has strict confidentiality and data security procedures to ensure that personal information is not given to unauthorised persons.

Find out how Public Health England and the NHS use and protect your screening information at www.gov.uk/phe/screening-data.

Where can I get more information?

You can find out more about syphilis from:

- NHS Choices
  www.nhs.uk/conditions/syphilis
- Patient.co.uk
  http://www.patient.co.uk/health/syphilis-leaflet

If you have any other questions or concerns talk to your doctor, midwife or health visitor.

Local contact:

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