



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CONGENITAL SYPHILIS

Q WHAT IS CONGENITAL SYPHILIS?

Congenital Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that occurs when a mother with syphilis passes the infection to her baby during pregnancy or delivery. Most of the time, syphilis is passed from mom to baby during pregnancy, but it can happen during vaginal birth if the baby has direct contact with a syphilis sore.

An expecting mother can get syphilis by having unprotected sex or intimate contact with a person who is infected with syphilis.

Q WHAT HAPPENS IF MY BABY HAS CONGENITAL SYPHILIS?

If a baby has congenital syphilis and the infection is left untreated, the baby can have life-long issues like seizures and developmental delays, or even worse, can die from the infection. How congenital syphilis affects your baby's health depends on how long you had syphilis and if or when you got treatment for the infection. Up to 40% of babies born to women with untreated syphilis can die from the infection.

During pregnancy, complications can include:

- Miscarriage (losing the baby during pregnancy)
- Stillbirth (a baby born dead)
- Prematurity (a baby born early)
- Low birth weight
- Death shortly after birth

Once your baby is born, your baby could have:

- Deformed bones
- Severe anemia (low blood count can't carry oxygen to the rest of the body)
- Enlarged liver and spleen
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)
- Brain and nerve problems, like blindness or deafness
- Meningitis
- Developmental delays

Q HOW DO I KNOW IF I OR MY BABY HAS SYPHILIS?

The only way to know if you or your baby has syphilis is to get tested. Your health care provider should test you for congenital syphilis during your first and third trimester visits with a simple blood test. If they do not, advocate for your baby's health by requesting the blood test. If you do not have health insurance or prenatal care, visit your local county health department to receive the free test.

It's important to have your sexual partner get tested for syphilis if you have the infection. Both partners must be treated or infection can continue to occur and affect your baby.

Q IS THERE A TREATMENT FOR SYPHILIS? IS IT CURABLE?

Syphilis is curable for you and your baby, but it's important to get treatment right away. Treatment can be free, and done with a shot or IV of simple antibiotics given by your doctor. The sooner you're treated, the less likely you and your baby are to have complications from your infection. Both you and your partner need to be treated or reinfection can occur and affect your baby.

Q IS CONGENITAL SYPHILIS PREVENTABLE?

Congenital syphilis is completely preventable. The only way to protect your baby is by protecting yourself from the infection while you are pregnant.

Ways to prevent infection:

- Use condoms during sex
- Limit your number of sexual partners
- Go to all of your prenatal checkups
- Have a conversation with your doctor if you think you have or may have been exposed to syphilis
- Get tested, even if you don't think you have syphilis
- Ask your partner to get tested for syphilis. Both you and your partner must be treated or the infection or it can continue to occur and affect your baby.

LEARN MORE: StopSyphilisFL.com

