



Syphilis is making a comeback among gay and bisexual men in Victoria.

Infectious syphilis rates are increasing rapidly in Victoria, with more than one person being diagnosed every day. This is double the rate in 2006 and more than thirty times the rate in 2000.

This is a significant increase and it's something to be concerned about because you could have syphilis, not know it, and potentially be passing it on to your sexual partners.

What is syphilis and how is it spread?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that is spread when your skin comes into direct contact with syphilis sores or rashes. It *can* be spread through oral sex (sucking or getting sucked), anal sex (fucking or getting fucked) or vaginal sex.

How do I know if I have it?

- You may have syphilis and not know it. But, you can still get very sick from syphilis *and* pass it on to others.
- You might have a painless sore on your penis, arse or throat or develop a rash on your chest, hands or feet.

How can I find out if I have syphilis?

A blood test is used to detect infection with syphilis.

Where can I get a syphilis test?

You can get a blood test for syphilis from your doctor, at a Sexual Health Clinic, or at any of the sites listed on the back of this brochure.

Is syphilis treatable?

Yes. If detected early, syphilis *can* be treated easily.

How can I protect myself?

- Using a latex condom for anal sex (fucking) and oral sex (sucking) can provide **some** protection against contact with syphilis.
- Given few people consistently use condoms for oral sex; regular testing (*every three months during the current syphilis outbreak*) should be a part of everyone's syphilis prevention plan if you are having oral or anal sex.

Three Important Facts To Remember:

1. Syphilis can be transmitted easily through oral sex without a condom;
2. Many people diagnosed do not show symptoms;
3. Syphilis can be treated easily – in an outbreak situation such as this, 3-monthly testing is recommended.

What About Syphilis & HIV?

What if you have HIV?

Men with HIV may have weakened immune systems that make them more susceptible to bacterial infections, including syphilis. Symptoms of infectious syphilis may be more severe and may progress more quickly to the later stages. Being infected with syphilis may also increase your viral load.

Simply put, syphilis can do much more damage in a shorter amount of time if you are HIV-positive.

What about testing and treatment?

If you're HIV-positive and having sex, 3-monthly syphilis testing is recommended in an outbreak situation such as this.

In people living with HIV, treating syphilis may take longer to treat and cure.

Does syphilis elevate the risk of HIV transmission?

Yes. Because infectious syphilis may cause sores and rashes, it is easier to get infected with HIV since these sores create more entry points for HIV. When a person is infected with syphilis (or any other sexually transmitted infection) there are more white blood cells in the infected mucosal area. Given that HIV can attach to these cells, this also explains the elevated risk of HIV transmission when you have syphilis.

For more information about syphilis and referrals:

HIV – Sexual Health Connect:
1800 038 125

Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre:
(03) 9865 6700 or 1800 134 840

PLWHA Victoria:
(03) 9865 6772

Online:
<http://www.thedramadownunder.info/>
<http://www.mshc.org.au/syphilis/>

For testing, please talk to your doctor or contact any of the following clinics:

Melbourne Sexual Health Clinic
Tel. (03) 9347 0244 or 1800 032 017

Centre Clinic St. Kilda
Tel. (03) 9825 5866

Centre Clinic Northcote
Tel. (03) 9481 7155

Carlton Clinic
Tel. (03) 9347 9422

Prahran Market Clinic (PMC)
Tel. (03) 9826 4500

Middle Park Clinic
Tel. (03) 9699 4926

North Richmond Clinic
Tel. (03) 9428 4148

The Alfred Hospital
Tel. (03) 9076 2000

The Royal Melbourne Hospital
Tel. (03) 9342 7000