



Spread the Word About the Link Between Syphilis and HIV

It's National STI Awareness Week. Did you know that having syphilis can increase your chance of getting and transmitting HIV?

April 19, 2024 By [HIV.gov](https://www.hiv.gov)

Once nearly eradicated, syphilis has reemerged as a major health concern in the United States. According to the latest CDC report, 207,255 total syphilis cases were reported in the United States in 2022, representing an 80% increase since 2018. As with HIV, racial, ethnic, sexual and gender minorities continue to be disproportionately affected.

If untreated, syphilis can cause serious health issues, including blindness, deafness, paralysis, and damage to the heart and brain. Further, congenital syphilis—a syphilis infection that is passed from a pregnant person who has syphilis to their unborn baby—can cause significant complications for the baby up to and including death. Congenital syphilis cases in the U.S. have increased more than 10-fold since 2012. This mirrors a 17.2% increase in primary and secondary (P&S) syphilis—the most infectious stages of syphilis—among reproductive-aged women (aged 15–44 years), according to the CDC report.

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#STIweek

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In response to the surging number of syphilis and congenital syphilis cases nationwide, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is taking action to slow the spread with a focus on those most significantly impacted. Through the establishment of the [National Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis Syndemic \(NSCSS\) Federal Task Force](https://www.hhs.gov/nscss), the Department is utilizing its agencies, expertise and stakeholder network to respond to the U.S. syphilis and congenital syphilis epidemic.

Syphilis and HIV: What's the Connection?

Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are disproportionately impacted by syphilis, accounting for almost half (45.1%) of all primary and secondary syphilis cases among people assigned male at birth in the U.S. in 2022. During 2021 to 2022, the number of cases of primary and secondary syphilis among this population increased 4.0%. According to CDC, approximately half of gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men who have primary and secondary syphilis also live with HIV. Transgender women are also disparately impacted by both syphilis and HIV.

And gay and bisexual and other men who have sex with men who are HIV-negative and diagnosed with primary and secondary syphilis are more likely to get HIV. That's because having a syphilis sore makes it easier for HIV to enter the body.

Syphilis is treatable and curable. However, having HIV can make syphilis harder to treat, especially if a person has advanced or untreated HIV.

Get the Word Out

National STI Awareness Week (April 14–20) provides an opportunity for HIV service organizations and other partners across the country to raise awareness about syphilis, help reduce the stigma associated with the infection, and help equip people with the tools and knowledge they need for prevention, testing, and treatment. Here are some resources you can use and share:

- CDC: STDs and HIV – CDC Basic Fact Sheet
- CDC: Las ETS y el VIH: Hoja informativa de los CDC
- CDC: Syphilis – CDC Basic Fact Sheet
- HIV.gov: [Syphilis and People with HIV](#)

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