

This information is for you if you are pregnant and have a positive test result for syphilis

This information is about:

- syphilis and being pregnant;
- how having syphilis can affect your baby; and
- treatment you can have while you are pregnant.

What your blood test result means

Your positive test result does not mean you definitely have syphilis. The results of the screening test for syphilis are not always easy to understand. An expert needs to look at the results and ask you questions about yourself and previous infections. Sometimes the result of the screening test will come back positive because you have had syphilis in the past and this has been treated. Other, less serious diseases can also cause a positive test result.

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a serious bacterial infection. If left untreated it can cause you serious problems later in life, including brain damage and heart problems. You may only have been unwell with syphilis for a short time when you acquired syphilis (that is, when the virus was passed to you) or you may not have had any symptoms. Syphilis infections can be treated successfully with antibiotics.

How am I syphilis-positive?

Syphilis can be passed on if you have condomless sex (sex without an external condom worn on the penis or internal condom worn in the vagina), with a person who has the infection. This includes oral sex.

What will happen next?

We need to confirm the result by taking another blood sample from you. It is very unlikely that this result will be any different. You will be offered an appointment at a sexual-health clinic for a full health check-up and assessment to help the clinic make a diagnosis. If the doctor thinks you have a syphilis infection they will also decide on the best treatment.

It is very important that syphilis is treated effectively to reduce the chance of the infection passing to your baby while you are pregnant. If the infection passes to your baby, it could cause miscarriage, stillbirth or abnormalities in your baby.

Your sexual-health specialist and midwife will be able to help you plan your care, discuss your choices and provide support.

Treatment for you

If you have syphilis you will be given antibiotics. After having the antibiotics you will be offered further blood tests to check that the infection has been completely cleared.

If you do not finish the treatment, the syphilis infection is very likely to be passed to your baby during pregnancy. This could be very dangerous for your baby. Your baby could die before birth or have a number of serious health conditions.

Once syphilis has been successfully treated, it will not come back unless you have sexual contact with someone with syphilis.

How will having syphilis affect my pregnancy and delivery?

If you are treated, having syphilis will not affect the rest of your pregnancy, your choices for delivery and feeding your baby.

How will having syphilis affect my baby?

The earlier in the pregnancy you start having antibiotic treatment, the less likely it is that your baby will have syphilis. If your infection is diagnosed later in pregnancy, your baby may have the condition. A paediatrician will examine your baby soon after they are born. Your baby will need several blood tests to see if they have syphilis and need antibiotics.

Will my baby need antibiotics?

Your baby may need antibiotics after the birth, especially if you were given antibiotics in late pregnancy, because there may still be a chance that they have syphilis.

Who needs to know that I have syphilis?

For you and your baby to have the best care, it is necessary to receive care from a number of specialists - for example, the sexual-health team, an obstetrician (hospital doctor) and a paediatrician (baby and child doctor).

You can also tell the specialist whether you want your GP to know you have syphilis. Your information will not be shared with others without your permission

You may want to ask your sexual-health team how to explain your positive test results to your partner. If your partner does not know whether they have syphilis, you should use condoms to prevent you from passing the virus to them. Your partner should consider getting tested for syphilis.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information about syphilis from:

- the hospital midwife who specialises in antenatal screening or the hospital doctor (the obstetrician);
- your nearest NHS sexual health clinic – you can phone your local hospital and ask for the sexual health clinic;
- the Public Health Wales website:
www.shwales.online/index.html