



Syphilis notifications continue to rise across Australia.¹ Early detection and routine testing are critical to preventing complications, including congenital syphilis. Integrating sexual health discussions into everyday clinical care ensures syphilis testing becomes a standard part of preventive health practice.

DID YOU KNOW



Around **50% of people** will have NO symptoms and will only be diagnosed by screening with serological testing.²



Cases have **doubled in the last decade**, and are not isolated to high-risk populations.¹



In 2025, syphilis was declared as a **Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance**.³

APPROACHING THE CONVERSATION

It's important to convey that syphilis is nothing to be ashamed of and raising awareness will help more people get tested and treated so we can stop the spread of the disease.

- Normalise testing as routine, not exceptional: Present syphilis testing as a part of everyday preventative health care.
- Emphasise the importance of early detection and prevention: Clearly explain why timely testing matters.
- Adopt a proactive approach to testing, given how often syphilis presents without symptoms.
- Ensure conversations are culturally safe and sensitive to individual context, including experiences of stigma or discrimination.
- Integrate testing conversations into relevant clinical moments: Use routine clinical interactions as opportunities to discuss syphilis sensibly and effortlessly.
- Reinforce that testing is quick, safe, and beneficial. It's a simple test and the treatments are highly effective.
- Explain that all discussions are confidential and that, if the test result is positive, sexual partners can be notified anonymously if desired.



KEY MOMENTS FOR CONVERSATION

It can be hard to bring up syphilis when you are speaking with your clients/patients. Some key opportunities for conversation could be:

- When discussing pregnancy plans
- A patient shows possible symptoms
- You're doing any STI check-up
- If they are part of a high priority population
- If they are reproductive age and have recently travelled overseas
- If they have asked about HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) or post-exposure prophylaxis PEP
- They present with another STI or have had a partner with another STI
- If the patient tells you they have new or multiple partners
- If they are getting full blood work done on their general health
- If you are discussing contraception

Here are some conversation starters that may help prompt a discussion about syphilis to help identify any concerns or gaps in management.

Align with guidelines and policies

- "Australian pregnancy guidelines recommend these tests to protect you and your baby."
- "As someone who is a man who has sex with men, STI testing is recommended every 3 months..."

Explain rationale

- "Given your symptoms, I'd like to run a few tests to figure out what might be going on. These tests will include syphilis and ..."
- "Anyone who has ever had sex can get syphilis, and the only way to know for sure is by getting tested."

Contextualise and normalise

- "When was the last time you had an STI test?"
- "As part of your health check we also ask about your sexual health. I ask everyone the same questions and your answers will help me work out what tests to do."
- "Early treatment is simple and highly effective."



FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THE STOP SYPHILIS INFORMATION HUB, OR SCAN HERE TO FIND OUT MORE.



This conversation guide has been developed in collaboration with two nurses and two GPs from Australia.

REFERENCES

1. Phua G, White C. The resurgence of syphilis in Australia. *Aust J Gen Pract.* 2024 Mar;53(3):133-137. doi:10.31128/AJGP-08-23-6943
2. South Australian Government, SA Health. Syphilis for health professionals [Internet]. Adelaide (SA): SA Health; Available from: <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/clinical+resources/clinical+programs+and+practice+guidelines/infectious+disease+control/syphilis/syphilis+for+health+professionals>
3. Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. Syphilis declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance [Internet]. Canberra (AU): Department of Health; 7 Aug 2025. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/syphilis-declared-cdins?language=en>