

Syphilis on the Rise: Take Action Today!

Syphilis is a growing problem in Alaska and across the United States. In 2016, Alaska had only 20 cases, but by 2022, that number skyrocketed to 424 cases. This increase is alarming, especially because it means more babies are being born with this preventable infection.

The good news is that healthcare providers can test for and treat syphilis. By getting tested, you can help protect yourself and our Tribal community.

What is Syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacterium called *Treponema pallidum*. It can affect anyone who is sexually active, regardless of age. The tricky part is that you might not know you have it because symptoms can be subtle or even absent.

Symptoms:

- Small, painless sores on the body, including the genitals and rectum.
- Swollen lymph nodes near the groin.
- Later stages can have more severe symptoms or none at all, making it harder to detect.

Complications:

Untreated syphilis can lead to serious complications, including severe neurological and cardiovascular issues. Pregnant women with untreated syphilis can pass the infection to their babies, causing stillbirth, premature birth, birth defects, and other long-term health problems.

Prevention and Treatment:

Early detection is crucial. Testing for syphilis usually involves a simple blood test done by your healthcare provider. The good news is that syphilis is treatable with antibiotics, especially penicillin. Treatment depends on the stage of the infection, and it's essential to complete the full course of antibiotics as prescribed.

For those allergic to penicillin, alternative antibiotics can be used. Regular follow-up testing is necessary to ensure the infection is fully cleared.

Syphilis can also be treated in its later stages, even though the process is more complex. It is important that *everyone* get tested, even people who have been in monogamous relationships for years. You may have been infected many years before and not show symptoms until much later when your symptoms could be very severe. Get tested for yourself and for those you love the most!

What Can We Do?

To tackle the rise of syphilis cases, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) healthcare providers are taking action. They are promoting testing, raising awareness through educational campaigns, and integrating syphilis screening into routine healthcare services.

By improving testing, offering treatment options, and raising awareness, we can fight syphilis together, protect our babies, and improve the health of our community. You can help by prioritizing your sexual health, getting tested regularly, and practicing safer sex. Together, we can keep our Tribal community healthy and strong!