

What happens to my baby after birth?

After birth, your baby will be fully checked by the baby doctor (paediatrician) for any signs of congenital syphilis and will also have a blood test.

The paediatrician will let you know if your baby needs antibiotic treatment after birth. Sometimes one dose of antibiotic is required for your baby.

As symptoms of congenital syphilis are not always present at birth but can develop over the next few months of the baby's life, you will be given an appointment for your baby to be seen at an outpatient clinic.

It is important to go to the outpatient appointment with the paediatrician to check your baby is well and has not developed syphilis.

Is it safe to breastfeed my baby if I have a positive syphilis test?

Yes, you can breastfeed your baby as you will not pass the infection to your baby through breast milk.

Is there anything else I need to know?

Even if you have been treated for syphilis, you can easily be infected again if your partner has not been tested and treated. It is important that your partner is also seen by the GUM doctor and tested and treated if necessary. If you think you are at risk of getting the infection again, you can discuss this with your midwife or doctor, who can organise another test at any time during your pregnancy.

Further information

Further information about syphilis can be found on the NHS Choices website at: www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Syphilis/Pages/Symptomspg.aspx

Details of Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics in Northern Ireland can be found at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/genitourinary-medicine-gum-clinics



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Syphilis: protecting your baby

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection. The infection is generally passed from person to person during sexual contact. **Syphilis can be easily treated with antibiotic medicine.** Even if you have been treated for syphilis in the past, you can still catch it again.

The earlier a syphilis infection is treated, the less chance there is of lasting damage. Syphilis has different stages of infection but, if not treated, the infection can, over many years, seriously damage other parts of the body, such as the heart and brain (tertiary syphilis). Treatment for tertiary syphilis will not cure the damage but may prevent it getting worse.

What happens if I have syphilis and I am pregnant?

If you have syphilis and are pregnant, you could pass the infection on to your unborn baby at any time during pregnancy or delivery.

This is more likely to happen in the early stages of your infection and will increase your risk of having a miscarriage, stillbirth or premature birth. It also increases the risk of serious, life-long illness in the baby (congenital syphilis).

All pregnant women in Northern Ireland are offered a test for syphilis during their pregnancy. This is part of the routine antenatal blood tests that are done between 10 and 14 weeks of pregnancy but can be done at any stage of pregnancy.

What happens if I have a syphilis positive test during pregnancy?

If you have a syphilis positive test during pregnancy, you need to be examined by a hospital doctor who specialises in genito urinary medicine (GUM).

Even if you have previously been treated for syphilis, you will be referred to the GUM clinic as there may still be a chance of passing the infection to your baby.

The GUM doctor will advise on what treatment you need. It is important to have the full treatment otherwise there is a chance it will not cure the infection.

Is the treatment for syphilis safe during pregnancy?

The antibiotic treatment (usually penicillin) is safe during pregnancy and will not harm your baby. If you are allergic to penicillin, the doctor will discuss alternative treatment with you.

Sometimes if you have an early infection of syphilis, the treatment can cause a short-term reaction that may include fever, chills, headache, muscle or joint pains, or uterine contractions. These do not last long and will go away naturally within 24 to 36 hours. If you are at risk of this, you may be admitted to hospital for observation for the first 24 to 48 hours of treatment.

It is important to remember that your baby is at greater risk if you do not have the treatment during pregnancy.

What happens if my baby develops congenital syphilis?

Around one in seven babies whose mothers have syphilis are born with the infection (congenital syphilis). Congenital syphilis can affect your baby in different ways – from a fever, rash, blindness and bone problems to failure to grow properly within the first two years of life.

After two years of age, your baby may have problems with their bones and teeth developing. Sometimes the symptoms of congenital syphilis are not obvious at birth but develop as your baby gets older.

Congenital syphilis can be prevented by giving a mother antibiotic treatment before her baby is born. The baby may also need antibiotic treatment after birth.

How will I know if the treatment has worked?

Your blood will be checked after your treatment to make sure the infection has gone. The GUM doctor will let you know when you should have the blood tests.

It is important to have these tests to make sure the antibiotics have worked and the infection has gone. You will also have your blood checked after you have delivered your baby.