

Syphilis

Definition

A sexually transmitted disease (STD), which in its late stages can cause mental disorders, blindness, and death.

Causes, Incidence & Risk Factors

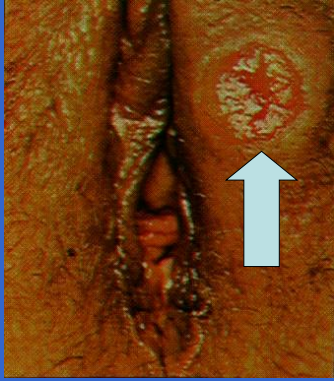
- Syphilis caused by a corkscrew-shaped bacterium called *Treponema pallidum*.
- Originally a disease prevalent in the 15th century, syphilis is making a comeback.
- This has largely been attributed to changes in
 - sexual habits
 - drug abuse, particularly trading sex for crack
 - unsafe sexual practice among teenagers
 - and declining support for public health services

- The infection is acquired by direct contact with the sores of infected individual.
- The bacterium is usually transmitted through the mucous membranes of the genital area, the mouth, or the anus, it can pass through broken skin anywhere on the body.
- The open sores of syphilis are believed to make it easier for the AIDS virus to enter the body.
- A pregnant woman with syphilis can transmit the disease to her unborn child, who may be born with serious mental and physical problems.

- The syphilis bacterium is very fragile, however, and the infection is rarely, if ever, spread by contact with objects such as toilet seats or towels.
- Because the early symptoms of syphilis can be very mild, many people do not seek treatment when they first become infected.
- However, untreated infected people can infect others during the first two stages of the disease, which can last for up to 2 years.
- The disease characterised in three stages
 - Primary
 - Secondary
 - Tertiary

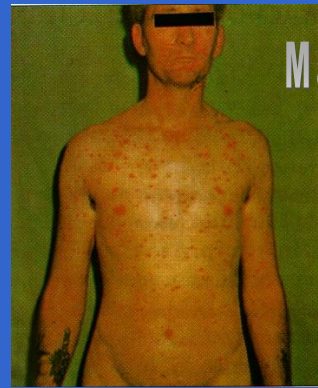
Primary

- Incubation period is three weeks from initial infection.
- A painless ulceration called a chancre (*shang-ker*) occurs at the site of infection.
- In men the lesion is usually on the penis or anus.
- In Women on the vulva or within the vagina or cervix (these lesions may be missed!!)
- Chancres are highly infective, but self limiting and heal within 4-6 weeks



Secondary

- The secondary stage represents systemic spread.
- Follows 2 months after initial lesions appear.
- Symptoms include..
 - fever
 - widespread rash
 - wart like lesions on the genitals
 - snail track ulcers on the buccal mucosa
 - generalised lymphadenopathy
- This stage is also self limiting and followed by a latent period of between 2 – 20 years



Macular
Rash



Condylomata lata
of the vulva



Snail-track

Tertiary Syphilis

- Chronic granulomatous lesions in the skin, mucosa and bones.
- Vascular lesions (aortic aneurysm)
- CNS lesions leading to general paralysis and "syphilitic madness" tabes dorsalis
- Neurosyphilis progresses rapidly in HIV patients

Prevention

- Safe sex behavior
- Wearing condoms
- Early diagnosis & treatment with antibiotics

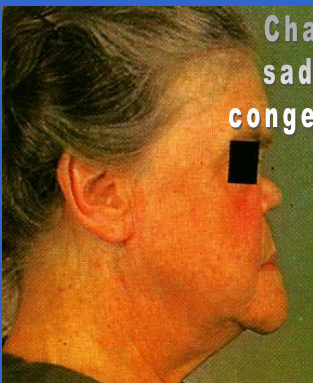
Complications

- Syphilitic madness
- Generalised paralysis
- Tabes dorsalis leading to
 - altered pain and positional sense
 - which in turn leads to joint destruction (Charcot joints)
- Congenital defects
- Death



Incisors have a typical screwdriver shape with marginal notching.

Characteristic saddle nose of congenital syphilis



Epiphysitis leading to destruction of the nasal septum