



## Syphilis, An Age Old Disease

Syphilis is a common and well known sexually transmitted disease (STD). Sexual intercourse is one of the most common ways to contract it. There are some historic figures that have suffered from syphilis, including Pope Alexander VI, Christopher Columbus, King Henry VIII and five of his wives, Francis I of France, Ivan the Terrible, Queen Elizabeth I, King Edward VI, Napoleon I of France, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Darwin, Abraham Lincoln, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, and Al Capone. Syphilis dates a long way back.

Known to many as "Syphilis - The Great Imitator", Syphilis has a multitude of presentations which makes it difficult to diagnose. It is passed from person to person with skin to skin contact, with the chancre, or Syphilis sore. Sores occur mainly on the external genitals, vagina, anus, or in the rectum. Sores also can occur on the lips and in the mouth. Syphilis is caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. As reported by the CDC: Health Officials reported over 36,000 cases of syphilis in 2006 and was highest in women 20 to 24 years of age and in men 35 to 39 years of age. Sadly, syphilis can take the life of its victims if it is left untreated. It can also result in damage to the heart, brain, and nerves.

There is an open sore which can either be found internally or externally and is usually on the genitals. If the disease isn't treated at this stage, it can progress and can cause fever, hair loss, swollen glands, a sore throat and a rash. If it goes untreated for a longer period of time, the severe consequences of Syphilis can be dementia, blindness and permanent problems with the nervous system.

"The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment" Tuskegee University: Written by:  
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"For forty years between 1932 and 1972, the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) conducted an experiment on 399 black men in the late stages of syphilis. These men, for the most part illiterate sharecroppers from one of the poorest counties in Alabama, were never told what disease they were suffering from or of its seriousness. Informed that they were being treated for "bad blood," their doctors had no intention of curing them of syphilis at all."

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The history of Syphilis is a long one, but nothing compares to the ethical debacle as the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. Which is the prelude to many ethical dilemmas in medicine today. However, Syphilis then as it is now, poses many challenges. The spread of the disease is far faster and easier than ever before. With women and men being promiscuous, and unashamed, the disease has been kept alive for centuries. Out of which, how many have lost their minds, or lives, unknowing?

People today, can learn a lot from those good old days, and keep themselves safe and disease free, with some vigilance, and due diligence, you too can keep from contracting or passing this deadly infectious disease on. Pregnant women who have the disease, can pass the disease onto their unborn child via the placenta, and if it isn't treated right away, then the mother is at a higher risk of stillborn, pre-term birth and other complications, or an infant that dies shortly after birth.

Where you can obtain more information:  
STD information and referrals to STD Clinics  
CDC-INFO  
1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)  
TTY: 1-888-232-6348  
In English, en Español  
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