

Treatment for Syphilis

The preferred treatment for syphilis is Bicillin® L-A (penicillin G benzathine suspension). Bicillin is an antibiotic given as two injections into the right and left buttock muscle. One dose of Bicillin is usually adequate to treat early syphilis but if the infection has been present for more than one year or is of unknown duration, then 3 consecutive weeks of Bicillin 2.4 Million Units is required.

Allergies

- Tell your health care provider if you have an allergy to any penicillin antibiotic such as Penicillin-V-K, Amoxicillin or any cephalosporin antibiotic such as Cefixime (Suprax®), Cephalexin, Cefaclor.

Pregnancy/Breastfeeding

- It is very important that pregnant women infected with syphilis receive treatment.
- Let your health care provider know if you are pregnant or you think you may be pregnant.
- Although women treated for syphilis in the second half of their pregnancy are at increased risk for premature labour and/or fetal distress, treatment is still necessary to prevent damage to the unborn child and serious health problems for the woman.
- If you notice any contractions or a decreased fetal movement after treatment, please contact your doctor immediately.
- The above complications are very rare after treatment of late syphilis infections.
- Please consult your physician before breastfeeding.

Treatment Reaction

- **Jarisch-Herxheimer Reaction** (i.e. fever, chills, headache, fatigue, or sweating) is a common reaction that can occur approximately 4-6 hours after treatment.
- Do not be alarmed, this is **not an allergic response** and usually ends within 24 hours.
- Acetaminophen, Aspirin, or Ibuprofen taken every 4 to 6 hours will help relieve the symptoms.
- Not everyone treated for early syphilis will have a Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction.
- A Jarisch-Herxheimer Reaction rarely occurs after treatment of late syphilis.

Care of Yourself Following Treatment

- It is important that you complete all of your treatment as directed.
- Please wait in the clinic 15 minutes after your treatment.
- If you have any reaction following treatment (for example: rash, itchiness, difficulty breathing), please inform a staff member immediately.
- If these symptoms occur after leaving the clinic, seek emergency medical help immediately.

Birth Control

- If you are using a hormonal form of birth control (oral tablets, ring or patch), use an additional non-hormonal method of contraception (i.e. condom/diaphragm) until your present cycle is completed.

Blood Donation

- Do not donate blood or organs.
- Canadian Blood Services test all donated blood. If a blood sample tests positive for syphilis it will automatically be discarded.

Treatment for Syphilis (cont'd)

EARLY Syphilis Treatment (History of syphilis sore, rash or infection <1 year duration):

Treatment

- **2.4 Million Unit Bicillin x 1** (2 injections) is considered adequate treatment for early syphilis.
- Each 2.4 Million Unit dose is divided into two intramuscular injections given in the right and left buttocks.
- Early syphilis symptoms such as a sore or rash should disappear in about 2 weeks.
- If the symptoms have not resolved within two weeks see your health care provider.

Special Instructions

- Do not have sex until 2 weeks after the treatment date.

Follow up Testing

- Follow-up blood tests are needed @ **6 and 12 months** after treatment.
- **HIV positive** clients need follow-up blood tests @ **3, 6, 9, and 12 months** after treatment.
- The blood antibody level or RPR ratio should drop slowly after treatment.
- If the RPR ratio does not drop sufficiently, re-treatment may be necessary.

Partner Notification and Follow-up

- A health care provider will contact you to discuss how you wish your current and previous sexual partners to be informed.
- Your sexual partners are considered contacts to syphilis even if they have no symptoms.
- All sexual partners will need to be examined, tested, and treated as contacts to syphilis.

LATE Syphilis Treatment (>1 year duration or Syphilis of Unknown Duration):

Treatment

- **2.4 Million Unit Bicillin x 3 doses** given 7 days apart.
- Each 2.4 Million Unit dose is divided into two intramuscular injections given in the right and left buttocks.
- The 7 day treatment interval between doses should not be changed unless absolutely necessary because there is no clinical data to support any other treatment schedule.

Special Instructions

- Do not have sex until 2 weeks after the first syphilis treatment is complete.

Follow up Testing

- You may need to have follow-up syphilis blood tests in future.
- On your last treatment date, your health care provider will discuss follow-up with you.

Partner Notification and Follow-up

- A health care provider will contact you to ask about any long term partners or children who may require follow up.
- All long term partners and children will need blood tests for RPR, TPPA, and FTA-ABS.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact your doctor, local health unit, or see contact information below.