

# Syphilis Progression and Complications in Adults

Exposure to pathogen

Primary incubation-21 Days (range 3-90 days)

## Primary Syphilis (Infectious)

Chancre  
Regional lymphadenopathy

Secondary incubation 4-10 weeks

## Secondary Syphilis (Infectious)

Rash Alopecia  
Gumma lesions Malaise  
Condylomata lata Lymphadenopathy

Typical progression of disease if left untreated

**Neurosyphilis**  
Invasion of *T. pallidum* into the central nervous system  
Can occur at any stage

### Early Neurosyphilis

Roughly 5% of early syphilis cases, risk increases with HIV infection, may be asymptomatic  
May present with severe headache, confusion, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, deafness, or optic neuritis.

Categories:

- Syphilitic meningitis
- Ocular syphilis
- Ootosyphilis



<1 year duration after infection

**Early Latent Syphilis - Early Non-Primary, Non-Secondary (Infectious)**  
Asymptomatic

Infections >1 year of duration

**Late Latent Syphilis, or Syphilis of Unknown Duration (Infectious Vertically)**  
Asymptomatic

**All cases of syphilis with neurological manifestations must be staged.**

**Rarely fatal in modern times, but can be damaging.**

### Late Neurosyphilis

~4-7 Years  
**Meningovascular syphilis**

~10-20 Years  
**General Paresis**  
**Progressive dementia**

~15-25 Years (Average of 20 years)  
**Tabes Dorsalis**

### Tertiary Syphilis (Non-Infectious)

**15 years after infection**  
Gummatous Syphilis (skin, bone, liver, nasal septum/hard palate perforation)

**10-30 years after infection**  
Cardiovascular Syphilis (Aortitis)  
90% asymptomatic  
10% have angina  
Also noted - aortic regurgitation, coronary artery stenosis, aneurysm

References:

Control of Communicable Diseases Manual (CCDM), 20th Edition, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2015.

Marra, Christina M. *Neurosyphilis* Up to Date, August 29, 2017.

Chart adapted from: Kent, Molly E. *Reexamining Syphilis: An Update on Epidemiology, Clinical Manifestations, and Management* Annals of Pharmacotherapy, 2008.