

sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

wildfact

Arizona used to be called the “Valentine State” since statehood was granted on Feb. 14, 1912.

Q I heard that syphilis is a problem again. Is that true?

A. For a small number of people, it could be a big problem, with dangerous complications. The Pima County Health Department has seen a surge in cases the past 3 years. Of the recent syphilis cases, 90% are in males who report having sex with a male partner (MSM). It appears that technology may be facilitating the recent increase, since in 63% of MSM cases of syphilis, patients report that they used a mobile dating app to find a partner.

What does it look like? Lesions (usually on the genitals) are the first stage of syphilis infection and typically appear 10-90 days after exposure. Syphilis sores usually appear as single, painless ulcers in the mouth, genitals or anus. Sometimes the lesions may appear in groups or, they may not be visible at all, which is why regular testing for sexually transmitted infections is a good idea for some people at higher risk of exposure.

Even without treatment, the sore may heal and disappear. However, the syphilis bacteria

can still circulate throughout the body and lead to a rash on the torso or in unusual places like the palms of the hands or soles of the feet. There may also be fever and body aches as well as swollen lymph nodes during the second stage of infection.

Is there a test for syphilis? There is a very specific blood test that can confirm if syphilis is in the body.

How is it treated? Because it is a bacterium, syphilis can be quickly cured with antibiotics when detected in the early stages. If left untreated, it can spread to organs throughout the body and cause serious and irreversible damage. Fortunately, most people seek treatment before then.

How can I avoid getting it? Several ways. Don't have unprotected sex. Period. Get tested with any potential partner(s). If you have a penis, put a condom on it when you have sex, especially if it's with a male partner.

Where can I learn more? Call the Pima County Health Department at (520) 724-7676 or visit www.cdc.gov



**CAMPUS
HEALTH**

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

SexTalk is written by Lee Ann Hamilton, MA, CHES, David Salafsky, MPH, and Carrie Hardesty, MEd, CHES, health educators at The UA Campus Health Service.



www.health.arizona.edu