

Age-old syphilis and its modern day rampage



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People perish for lack of knowledge. So goes an age-old adage. What people should know about the causes, symptoms and treatment of Syphilis are widespread, and yet, the increase of those getting infected continue to rise. Recent data from the Center for Disease Control reveal that the number of new syphilis cases in year 2004 was 33, 401; new syphilis cases per 100, 000 population on that same year was 11. 5 (CDC).

In spite of the fact that its origin can be traced back to ancient times, its prevalence could still be felt today because of its contagious nature. What is this physical affliction that has become so common that its gruesome effect has been deadened by its sheer familiarity? If all the facts dealing with this disease are true and taken seriously, probably the statistics will show a different picture. But since the record tells what is the reality regarding syphilis, this should create a massive awareness among people that will help curb the set pace of this illness. In this paper, attempt has been made to discuss the cause/s, symptoms, and the treatment of syphilis.

Cause/s of Syphilis *Treponema Pallidum* is the causative agent or bacterium that causes the infection called syphilis. It is supposed to be a sexually transmitted infection, but proven studies show it can also be transmitted from mother to infant in the course of pregnancy and can cause what has been called a congenital syphilis in a child. On rare cases, it is said that syphilis can be contracted through other means than from sexual partner or from mother to infant. Because the bacteria causing syphilis are fragile, one can't be infected simply by using utensils or any other public implements shared by possibly infected person (Source: The Mayo Clinic).

Transmission is through direct contact with an afflicted individual. Most common way of contracting this disease is through sexual intercourse with a person who is positively infected with syphilis. If one is already sick with the illness, the person can pass the bacteria from his/her affected skin - the genital area, anus, mouth - to the mucous membranes or skin of the sexual partner (Source: NIAID). Symptoms of the Illness The difficulty with contracting Syphilis lies in ascertaining when the person has the disease. Its characteristic label is " the great imitator" indicating that the disease exhibits symptoms akin to many other illnesses (Source: The Mayo Clinic).

What is worse is when a person is HIV infected this can create changes in the symptoms and course of the disease. Except for congenital syphilis, this disease takes place in four (4) stages that overlap on occasion. With primary syphilis, an open sore or chancre that is usually without pain appears on the skin and oftentimes is found in the genital portions. This happens within ten to ninety (10-90) days upon exposure. Because the symptoms seemed harmless, the affected person rarely knows he has it so if left without treatment, this advances on to the next stage. With secondary syphilis, skin rash will appear on the surface of the skin in any part of the body; even in the hands and in the soles of the feet. In latent syphilis, the symptoms are no longer apparent but this is the time when a person can contaminate or infect another especially in the early latent stage. It is in the tertiary stage of syphilis when the dreaded complications occur.

However, there are only some of those who develop this stage even when a person is untreated. Damage to various vital organs occurs in this stage: bones, nervous system, heart, brain, eyes, joints or any part of the body.

This stage may inflict mental illness, blindness, memory loss or other neurological problems, heart disease and death. Brain or spinal cord damage is one of the grave signs of the tertiary stage (Source: NIAID). Pictures of a person with chancre appear below while the bacterium responsible for the disease also follows. When symptoms such as the open sore especially in the genital area and skin rash appear, it is best that the individual have himself tested for the disease (CDC).

There are a lot of risks when a woman is pregnant and has contracted the syphilis bacteria. The results range from miscarriages, or babies not carried to full term/premature babies, stillbirths, or neonatal death. Some babies may or may not develop symptoms of the disease but untreated babies can have an assortment of physical ailments like deformities, developmental delays, seizures, rashes, fever, jaundice and other diseases to the liver. As what was mentioned with adults, symptoms in babies or children are oftentimes unnoticed and may advance to the late or tertiary stage when damage to the organs occurs (Source: The Mayo Clinic).

Medical Treatment and/ or Intervention With an early detection in the first stage, treatment is easier with penicillin hence this disease can still be cured. This medicine is injected intramuscularly, or another antibiotic is taken by mouth when cases of allergy to the medicine happen. Repeated daily doses of the antibiotic are given in cases of penicillin allergy (Source: The Mayo Clinic). However, when the person has the late stage of the disease already, damage is already incurred in the body of the person.

When under treatment, the affected person should abstain from sexual intercourse until the sores have completely healed. Conclusion Discretion

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and wisdom in the affairs of a person's lifestyle are just some of the essential things a person must take in order to avoid or prevent a person from having this kind of disease. Firstly, it is just proper that the most important part in sex education should be placed on the information dissemination regarding the dire consequences of "unlimited or unrestrained" sex.

Secondly, there are lifestyles that permit this to happen; men having sex with other men, and preferences to this nature, encourage increase of the occurrence of the disease. Although, a person is left to himself to choose his own lifestyle, there are those who are innocent when a disease like syphilis is contracted. Somebody's wife or husband, the baby or children, are those who have no choice but not know that a partner or parent has the disease. Syphilis has long been discovered and its cure available. There is hope that with education and proper choices in lifestyles, the sexually transmissible disease of syphilis will no longer be on a rampage.