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SHINE SA Launches ‘Get Lucky? Get Tested for Syphilis’ Campaign to Promote Syphilis Testing and Awareness

Syphilis was once thought of as a historical disease, and until recently, case numbers were low but stable. Over the past few years however, in SA and across the country, there have been dramatic increases in this sexually transmitted infection (STI).

In response, SHINE SA has launched a new campaign: ‘Get Lucky? Get Tested for Syphilis’. The campaign aims to raise awareness of syphilis as well as to encourage South Australians to practice safer sex, get tested regularly and get treated.

Why is syphilis testing and treatment important?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection that if left untreated can have serious health consequences.

The first sign of syphilis infection will be a painless sore (on the mouth, anus, penis, vagina or cervix), however this can easily be missed and will go away on its own. The infection can later progress to cause a number of symptoms such as a body rash and hair loss. These will also resolve and for some people there will be no symptoms for several years. However, if left untreated, syphilis will spread throughout the body and can damage the brain, vision, heart, bones and more.

Syphilis can also be passed on to a baby during pregnancy, which is known as congenital syphilis. Congenital syphilis is serious and can cause miscarriage, early birth and infant death. Babies born with syphilis can have significant, lifelong health problems.

Syphilis is highly infectious in the first two years of infection, however the good news is that syphilis is curable. This makes regular testing crucial for effective treatment and prevention.

Who needs testing for syphilis?

Sexual health is everyone’s business, and STIs don’t discriminate.

SHINE SA encourages health professionals to include syphilis in their routine sexual health screening. Syphilis symptoms are not easy to identify or always present, so testing regularly is important.

The Australian STI Guidelines recommend yearly STI screening (including syphilis testing) for all sexually active people under the age of 30. It’s also a good idea to have a sexual health check whenever you change partners, have sex without a condom, or if you notice any symptoms.

Syphilis testing should also be done before and throughout pregnancy. Syphilis testing is recommended at the first pregnancy/antenatal care check-up and at 28 and 36 weeks.

What are the key messages of this campaign?

- Like most STIs, it’s common to have syphilis without knowing it. The only way to know for sure is to get tested.
- Syphilis is now part of a regular sexual health check. Early detection and treatment can prevent serious health issues and reduce the spread of syphilis.
- Syphilis is on the rise in South Australia. It’s important to practice safer sex, get tested regularly and get treated.
- If you’re pregnant or planning pregnancy, it’s important to get tested for syphilis.

Get involved

Health services, community groups and organisations are encouraged to get involved in this campaign by sharing information and resources on syphilis. SHINE SA have a range of resources including posters and brochures available at www.shinesa.org.au/getlucky

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