

New York State Department of Health

Chancroid (soft chancre)

Last Reviewed: November 2006

What is chancroid?

Chancroid is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by a bacterium. It is common in tropical countries but rare in other parts of the world.

Who gets chancroid?

Any sexually active person can be infected with chancroid. It is more commonly seen in men than in women, particularly uncircumcised males.

How is chancroid spread?

Chancroid is spread by sexual contact with an infected individual. The bacteria are more likely to invade the sexual organs at the point of a pre-existing injury, such as a small cut or scratch. The likelihood of transmission is greater if a person is very active sexually and does not practice personal hygiene.

What are the symptoms of chancroid?

The first sign of infection is usually the appearance of one or more sores or raised bumps on the genital organs. Sores are surrounded by a narrow red border which soon becomes filled with pus and eventually ruptures, leaving a painful open sore. In 50 percent of untreated cases, the chancroid bacteria infect the lymph glands in the groin. Within five to 10 days of the appearance of primary sores, the glands on one side (sometimes both sides) of the groin become enlarged, hard and painful. A rounded painful swelling results which may eventually rupture.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear four to seven days after exposure.

When and for how long is a person able to spread chancroid?

Chancroid is contagious as long as the infected person has any open sores. The open sores contain bacteria and any contact with these sores can result in infection.

What complications can result from chancroid?

Untreated chancroid often results in ulcers occurring on the genitals. Sometimes the ulcers persist for weeks or months.

Does past infection with chancroid make a person immune?

No. Reinfection can readily occur immediately after cure. There is no evidence of natural resistance.

What is the treatment for chancroid?

Chancroid may be successfully treated with certain antibiotics. Lesions and ulcers can be expected to heal within two weeks.

How can the spread of chancroid be prevented?

- Limit the number of your sex partners.
- Use a condom.
- Carefully wash the genitals after sexual relations.
- If you think you are infected, avoid any sexual contact and visit your local STD clinic, a hospital or your doctor. Notify all sexual contacts immediately so they can obtain examination and treatment.

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