

## Contact us

Phone 0800 739 432 Monday to Friday to book your appointment at one of the Auckland Sexual Health Clinics or visit our website [www.ashs.org.nz](http://www.ashs.org.nz) for more information around opening hours.

**Greenlane Clinical Centre**  
Building 7 Level 3  
Greenlane West

**South Auckland**  
12 Waddon Place  
Mangere

**North Shore**  
418 Glenfield Rd  
Glenfield

**West Auckland**  
Totara Health Level 2  
1 McCrae Way  
New Lynn



*This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on disease. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. People are strongly advised to check with their healthcare provider about any specific questions or concerns. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of publishing (2020).*

## Auckland Sexual Health Service

### The facts about Yaws



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## What is Yaws?

A Yaws is an infection caused by the bacterium (bug) *Treponema pallidum pertenuis*. Yaws does not occur in New Zealand.

The disease occurs mainly in poor communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Until 1961 it was common in the Pacific islands. Between 1959 to 1961 people from Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands and Tokelau Islands were given injections of penicillin as part of a special World Health Organisation (WHO) campaign to stop the disease.

Yaws has not come back in these islands but people who were born before the WHO campaign may still have signs of past infection in their blood and this can be picked up on a blood test.

Today Yaws is still seen occasionally in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

## How do I know I have Yaws?

Yaws is not a sexually transmitted infection but is spread by skin-to-skin contact from skin sores.

This usually happens during childhood. About 75% of those affected are aged less than 15 years.

A single sore develops where the bacterium enters the body, usually 2 to 4 weeks after infection.

If not treated sores will appear all over the body. These skin sores may be found on the legs, arms, nose, mouth and soles of the feet. Bone pain may also occur.

Without treatment about 10% of people will get problems after 5 years. The disease is not usually fatal but can cause facial disfigurement and destruction of the skin and bones.

## How is Yaws diagnosed?

Yaws is usually diagnosed by a doctor or nurse based on the symptoms and appearance of the sores.

People who have been infected in the past with Yaws produce an antibody in their blood to the bacterium causing Yaws.

This antibody is identical to the antibody produced by the bacterium causing syphilis.

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum pallidum* which is closely related to the Yaws bacterium (*Treponema pallidum pertenuis*).

Unfortunately it is impossible to tell from the blood test whether the person has Yaws or the more serious syphilis infection.

When applying for residency into New Zealand and most other countries you are required to have a blood test for Syphilis.

If you attend a Sexual Health Clinic your blood will also be tested for Syphilis.

This test will be positive if you have been infected in the past with either of the treponemes (types of bacteria) which cause Yaws or Syphilis. Both these infections make the same antibody.