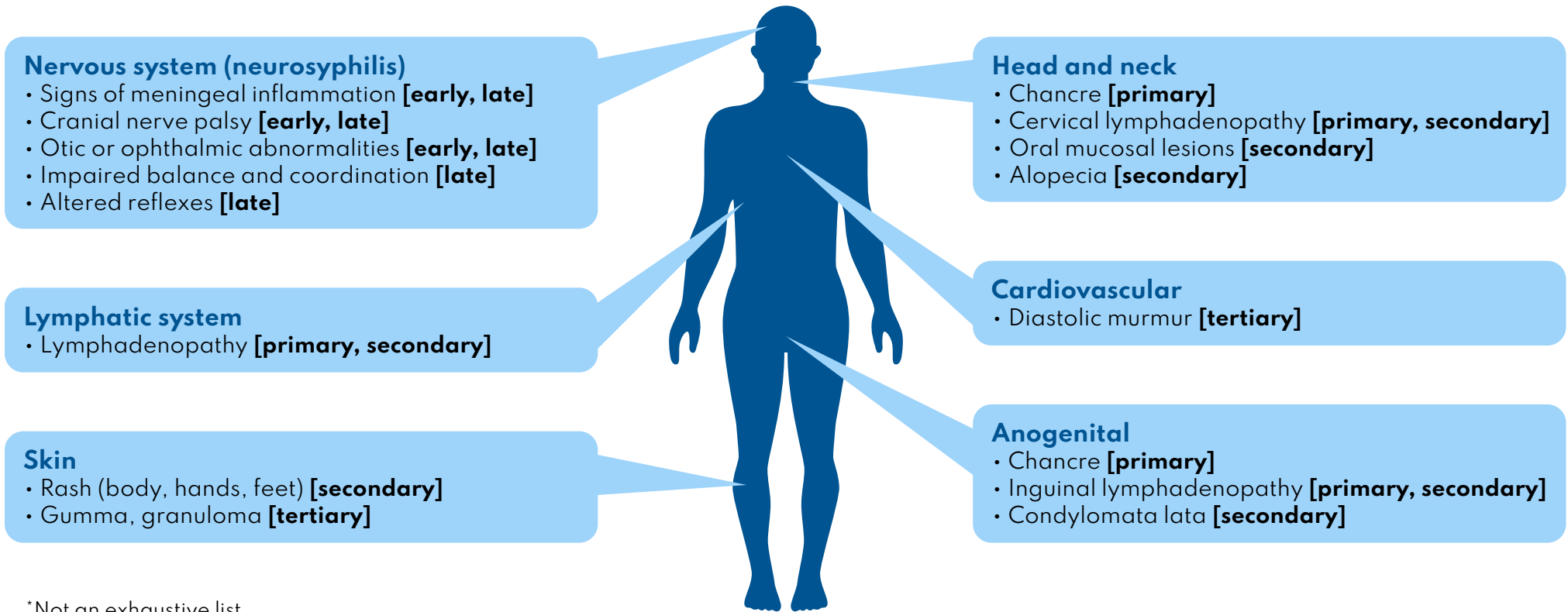




# Staging a Syphilis Infection in Adolescents and Adults: Selected Physical Exam Findings According to Stage of Disease\*

The clinical manifestations of syphilis are usually described according to stage of disease: primary, secondary, latent and tertiary syphilis. Early and late neurosyphilis can also occur.



\*Not an exhaustive list.

# Staging a Syphilis Infection in Adults and Adolescents: Signs and Symptoms\*\*

## Primary Syphilis

### Timing:

Usually occurs 3 weeks after infection, but can occur anywhere from 3 to 90 days post-infection.

### Signs & symptoms:

Painless lesion (chancre), regional lymphadenopathy.



(1.1) Oral chancre<sup>1</sup>



(1.2) Vaginal chancre<sup>2</sup>



(1.3) Penile chancre<sup>3</sup>



(1.4) Inguinal lymphadenopathy<sup>4</sup>

\*\*See the [Syphilis Guide for Health Professionals](#) for more information.

# Secondary Syphilis

## Timing:

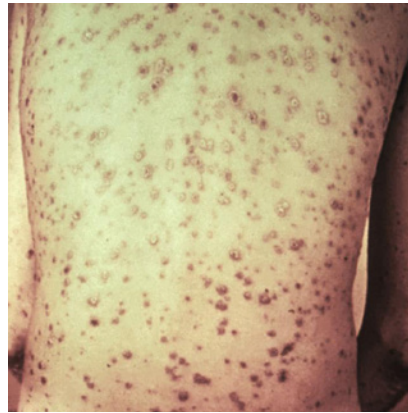
Usually occurs from 2 to 12 weeks after infection, but can occur up to 6 months post-infection.

## Signs & symptoms:

Rash, fever, malaise, mucosal lesions, condylomata lata, lymphadenopathy, patchy or diffuse alopecia.



(2.1) Mucosal lesions on tongue<sup>5</sup>



(2.2) Secondary syphilis rash on body<sup>6</sup>



(2.3) Secondary syphilis palmar rash<sup>7</sup>



(2.4) Vaginal condylomata lata<sup>8</sup>

## Latent Syphilis

### Timing:

**Early latent syphilis** is an asymptomatic infection of less than 1 year duration. It is considered infectious because of the 25% chance of relapse to the secondary stage.

**Latent syphilis of unknown duration** is an asymptomatic infection where the duration cannot be confirmed (i.e. no serologic testing within the prior 12 months).

**Late latent syphilis** is an asymptomatic infection of more than 1 year duration.

### Signs & symptoms:

All latent syphilis infections are present without signs or symptoms.

## Neurosyphilis

### Timing:

**Early neurosyphilis** occurs within the first year after infection.

**Late neurosyphilis** occurs more than 1 year after infection.

Note that HIV alters the natural course of syphilis and sometimes results in a more rapid progression to neurosyphilis with more aggressive and atypical signs of infection.

### Signs & symptoms:

**Early neurosyphilis:** Meningitis (e.g. headache, nuchal rigidity), uveitis/retinitis (e.g. blurred vision, red eye, flashers, floaters), otic signs and symptoms (e.g. hearing loss, tinnitus).

**Late neurosyphilis:** General paresis (e.g. personality and cognitive changes), tabes dorsalis (e.g. Argyll Robertson pupils, ataxia, sensory changes, abnormal reflexes).

# Tertiary Syphilis

## Timing:

Late neurosyphilis, cardiovascular syphilis, or syphilitic gumma can develop years to decades after infection.

## Signs & symptoms:

**Cardiovascular syphilis:** Aortic aneurysm, aortic regurgitation, coronary artery ostial stenosis.

**Syphilitic gumma:** Gummatous lesions causing tissue damage, with clinical manifestation depending on the site involved.

**Late neurosyphilis:** General paresis (e.g. personality and cognitive changes), tabes dorsalis (e.g. Argyll Robertson pupils, ataxia, sensory changes, abnormal reflexes).



(3.1) Argyll Robertson pupils, indicative of late neurosyphilis<sup>9</sup>



(3.2) Intraoral gummatous lesion of the soft palate<sup>10</sup>



(3.3) Cutaneous ulcerative lesion on the forearm<sup>11</sup>



(3.4) Syphilitic gumma of the testicle<sup>12</sup>

# Congenital Syphilis: Signs and Symptoms<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

## Early Congenital Syphilis

### Timing:

Presentation before 2 years of age.

### Signs & symptoms:

More than half of liveborn infants with congenital syphilis are asymptomatic at birth.<sup>13</sup> If present, signs and symptoms may include mucocutaneous lesions (e.g. maculopapular rash, desquamation), hepatosplenomegaly, anemia, fulminant disseminated infection.



(4.1) Papular rash on the chin and lips and darkly pigmented spots on the feet<sup>14</sup>



(4.2) Rhinitis (snuffles)<sup>15</sup>



(4.3) Typical desquamating and maculopapular skin lesions<sup>16</sup>



(4.4) Copper coloured palmar rash<sup>17</sup>

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>See the [Syphilis Guide for Health Professionals](#) and the [Canadian Pediatric Society's Position Statement](#) for more information.

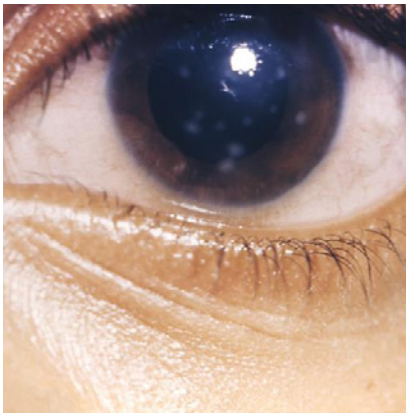
# Late Congenital Syphilis

## Timing:

Presentation after 2 years of age.

## Signs & symptoms:

Musculoskeletal involvement (e.g. osteoperiostitis, saddle nose), interstitial keratitis, eighth nerve deafness, dental abnormalities (e.g. Hutchinson's teeth, mulberry molars).



(5.1) Interstitial keratitis<sup>18</sup>



(5.2) Hutchinson's teeth<sup>19</sup>



(5.3) Mulberry molar (rounded enamel cusps on the permanent first lower molars)<sup>20</sup>



(5.4) Osteoperiostitis of the tibia leading to characteristic sabre shins<sup>21</sup>

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