

[Syphilis](#) as a major issue has been affecting Jefferson County since 2002. In 2006, there were 238 reported cases in Jefferson County alone. At first, you could pin point the specific areas in Jefferson County that were affected, but now it's county wide. Alabama is currently ranked fifth in the nation with cases of syphilis, gonorrhea, and Chlamydia. Jefferson County has the tenth highest number of recorded cases of syphilis in the country.

According to the [Jefferson County Department of Health](#), people between the ages of 15-29 are most affected by the sexually transmitted disease as this age group is considered to be the most sexually active. Lari McManns, a disease intervention specialist, said the number of cases among 60 - 70 year olds are increasing cases, and women who are pregnant and don't know that they have the disease are passing it to their unborn children.

Statistics collected from the [Centers of Disease Control and Prevention](#) show more men than women are affected by syphilis mainly because of having more than one sexual partner (whether male or female). They say that 9.2 per 100,000 people in here in Jefferson County are suffering with the disease compared to the total male rate of 5.7 per 100,000.

So what is syphilis and why is there such a high incident of syphilis in Jefferson County? Could it be people are not educated on what this sexually transmitted disease is?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacterium *treponema pallidum*. It is passed from person to person through contact with syphilis sore. It is transferred mainly through heterosexual sex or oral sex. It is one of the most frequently reported diseases here in Alabama along with syphilis, Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV.

There are three stages of the STD. The primary stage of syphilis is shown by a sore, which is called a chancre. The sore appears for about 3 to 6 weeks, and if it is not treated it will progress to the secondary stage. The secondary stage consists of a skin rash and mucous membrane lesions. If this stage is not treated it will then progress to the late and latent stage of syphilis. This stage appears when the primary and secondary stage disappears. The late stage can appear about 10 to 20 years after the infection has appeared in the body. This stage can damage organs such as the brain, eyes, heart, liver and bones.

So where can people go to get tested and treated for syphilis?

People can go to there primary physician. McManns said you can also go to the Health Department in your area to get checked for \$5. In most cases the fee can be waived there. They have qualified counseling and all results and interviews are confidential. They can be contacted either through [their website](#) or by phone at 205.930.1175