

# Young People's Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Educational Needs Toward Syphilis: A Cross-Sectional Study

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**Background:** Syphilis, a sexually transmitted infection (STI), remains a significant global public health concern, particularly among young people. If left untreated, syphilis can lead to severe complications.

**Aim and Methods:** The aim of this cross-sectional study was to assess the knowledge, attitudes, practices, and educational needs regarding syphilis among undergraduate university students aged 19-24 years in Oman. The study employed a convenience sampling approach, and participants were invited to complete a validated self-administered questionnaire online, facilitated by the deanship of admissions and registration.

Knowledge about Syphilis infection	Correct n (%)
1. Syphilis is sexually transmitted infection (STI) that mainly transmitted through sexual contact	202 (84.5%)
2. Syphilis is curable	85 (35.6%)
3. A person looks healthy may have syphilis	131 (54.8%)
4. People without symptoms can still get problems later on if they are not treated	127 (53.1%)
5. Using condoms correctly in sexual contact can prevent syphilis transmission	119 (49.8%)
6. Syphilis infection can increase the risk of HIV transmission or acquisition	110 (46%)
7. Sex partners of syphilis patients need to attend a hospital for serological examination	178 (74.5%)
8. Syphilis infected women can transmit the syphilis to their neonatal	89 (37.2%)
9. Syphilis can cause miscarriage or still-birth in the baby if a pregnant woman is not treated	71 (29.7%)
10. Having dinner or shaking hands with syphilis patients can infect syphilis	139 (58.2%)
11. Syphilis is usually diagnosed by a blood test	101 (42.3%)
12. The first symptom of syphilis is one or more sores on the penis, anus, mouth or cervix	141 (59%)
13. Other most common symptom of syphilis is a rash which may affect the palms of the hands or soles of the feet.	103 (43.1%)
14. The symptoms of syphilis can disappear on its own	37 (15.5%)
15. Syphilis is easily treated with antibiotics	45 (18.8%)
16. The person cured of syphilis can be reinfected	79(33.1%)

n =239  
Note: Syphilis Knowledge was assessed by giving 1 to correct answer and 0 to the wrong answer. The scale measured Syphilis knowledge from maximum 16 to minimum 0. Scores < 12 were taken as unsatisfactory, and ≥ 12 as satisfactory knowledge of Syphilis.

## Results:

- Of the 515 surveyed students, 49.3% were girls and 50.7% were boys. Only 239 (46.4%) had heard about syphilis with the majority obtaining their information from the Internet, friends, and social media.
- However, the participants' overall knowledge about syphilis, including symptoms, transmission and prevention, was found to be unsatisfactory, with a mean total score of 7.35 out of 16 (SD = 3.68).
- Factors such as a higher academic year and being in a health science speciality were significantly associated with increased awareness of syphilis ( $p < 0.001$ ).
- The participants demonstrated negative attitudes and poor levels of practice toward syphilis, with 442 (85.9%) participants had not undergone syphilis screening.
- The study found significant positive linear correlations between knowledge-practice ( $r = 0.295$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), knowledge-attitude ( $r = 0.301$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and attitude-practice ( $r = 0.410$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) regarding syphilis.

**Conclusion:** This study highlights inadequate knowledge and poor practices regarding syphilis among undergraduate university students in Oman. Improving knowledge about syphilis can lead to better practices and attitudes toward the disease. This emphasizes the necessity of developing a syphilis education policy, implementing school-based education programs, and conducting health education campaigns to enhance syphilis awareness among young people in Oman and other Asian countries facing similar challenges.

**References:** World Health Organization. (2023). *Syphilis Key Facts 2023*. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/syphilis>

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