

Bejel is an infectious disease that is rare in the United States but common in certain parts of the world. The infection is very similar to syphilis but is not sexually transmitted. Most frequently, transmission is by means of non-sexual skin contact or by common use of eating and drinking utensils. The organism that causes bejel belongs to the same family as the bacterium that causes syphilis, pinta and yaws and is known as treponema. Treponemas are spiral-shaped bacteria (spirochetes). Also known as endemic syphilis, bejel is characterized by lesions of the skin and bones that begin in the mouth and progress in gradual stages. The late stages are the most severe. Bejel is a rare infectious disease caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium (spirochete), known as *Treponema pallidum* endemicum. Under a microscope, *T. p. endemicum* is virtually indistinguishable from *Treponema pallidum*, the bacterium that causes syphilis. The disease is not sexually transmitted. The diagnosis of bejel is based on the geographic history of the patient as well as laboratory testing of material from the lesions (darkfield examination). The responsible bacterium is readily identifiable on sight in a microscope as a treponema. Samples of the fluid that surrounds the lesions yield a positive VDRL (Venereal Disease Research Laboratory) and FTA-ABS (fluorescent treponemal antibody-absorption) test. However, additional history may be required to differentiate bejel from venereal syphilis.