



DATE:	03/11/2015
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Karen M. Murphy, PhD, RN, Acting Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Testing for Syphilis: Counties in Which the Rate of Syphilis Is At or Above the Level at Which Special Precautions Should Be Taken
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	Statewide
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Advisory” that provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING, AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL

EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) is providing the following update in response to a significant increase in the annual rate of reported syphilis in the female population since 2010.

Special testing precautions for all pregnant women are to be taken in the following counties: **Delaware, Allegheny, York, Berks, Lycoming, Luzerne, Dauphin, Lancaster, Schuylkill, Fayette, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Erie, Blair, Franklin, Montgomery, Bucks, Beaver and Butler.** PADOH is recommending pregnant females in the impacted counties be offered a test for syphilis in the following situations:

- At the third trimester of pregnancy;
- At the delivery of a child, or;
- At the delivery of a stillborn child.

This notice is in addition to the statewide requirement for syphilis testing contained in

28 Pa Code § 27.89 (a)(1)(i) that directs a physician who attends, treats or examines a pregnant woman for conditions relating to pregnancy to offer the woman a test for syphilis at the time of first examination.

If a pregnant woman does not object, the test shall be performed in accordance with 28 Pa Code §27.89. If a pregnant woman objects, the regulation requires the person attending the woman to explain to her the need for the test. With respect to the woman who has given birth, information relating to the test or the objection to the test is to be recorded in both the woman's medical record and in the record of the newborn, as regulation states.

All Other Counties

Please note that physicians in all other counties not listed in the Health Advisory are still required to offer pregnant women a test for syphilis at the time of first examination for conditions related to pregnancy in accordance with **28 Pa Code § 27.89 (a)(1)(i)**.

In addition, all patients presenting with any of the following symptoms should be immediately tested for syphilis:

- A macular and/or papular rash on the palms of the hands or on the soles of the feet
- A generalized rash that may be macular, papular, or papulosquamous on the back, chest, or stomach
- A lesion in the genital, rectal, or oral area
- Moist papules in the anogenital region or the mouth
- Sudden "Moth-eaten" scalp alopecia with a typical onset at the back of the head
- Loss of eyelashes and the lateral third of the eyebrows
- Generalized lymphadenopathy
- Malaise

Treatment Information

Additional information on the treatment and follow-up of syphilis is also available by consulting the CDC's "Sexually Transmitted Diseases Treatment Guidelines – 2010," that is available on the internet at www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/.

Special Note: Parenteral Benzathine penicillin **G** is the only therapy with documented efficacy for syphilis during pregnancy. Pregnant women with syphilis in any stage who report penicillin allergy should be desensitized and treated with Benzathine penicillin **G**. Due to the recent changes in health care delivery, some providers have not been able to obtain cost-effective access to Benzathine penicillin **G** for their at-risk pregnant clients, in these situations providers are strongly encouraged to contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health for assistance in these situations.

Additional Information

Physicians needing additional information are asked to call the following number:

Pennsylvania Department of Health
Bureau of Communicable Diseases
Division of TB/STD
STD Program
(717) 787-3981
8:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M

Additional Web Links

Additional information on syphilis testing and treatment for pregnant women can be found online at: www.cdc.gov/std/treatment.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary

<p>This information is current as of March 11, 2015, but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.</p>
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