

**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
2017- PAHAN -374 -05-10-ADV**

**Testing for Syphilis: Counties in Which the Rate of Syphilis Is At  
or Above the Level at Which Special Precautions Should Be Taken**

<b>DATE:</b>	May 10, 2017
<b>TO:</b>	Health Alert Network
<b>FROM:</b>	Karen M. Murphy, PhD, RN Secretary of Health
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Testing for Syphilis: Counties in Which the Rate of Syphilis Is At or Above the Level at Which Special Precautions Should Be Taken</b>
<b>DISTRIBUTION:</b>	Statewide
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Statewide
<b>STREET ADDRESS:</b>	n/a
<b>COUNTY:</b>	n/a
<b>MUNICIPALITY:</b>	n/a
<b>ZIP CODE:</b>	n/a

**This transmission is a “Health Advisory” 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 significant rates and/or significant increases in the total 2016 reported primary and secondary (P&S) syphilis cases in the counties listed in the table below.

<b>CDC Reporting County</b>	<b>2015 Total Primary and Secondary Syphilis Cases</b>	<b>2016 Total Primary and Secondary Syphilis Cases</b>	<b>2015 to 2016 Percent Change</b>	<b>2016 Primary and Secondary Syphilis Case Rate Per 100,000 Population</b>
Adams	1	3	200.00%	2.93
Allegheny	129	87	NA	7.07
Armstrong	0	2	NA	2.98
Bucks	19	24	26.30%	3.83
Cambria	3	3	0.00%	2.2
Centre	1	3	200.00%	1.87
Chester	4	16	300.00%	3.1
Dauphin	10	11	10.00%	4.03

Delaware	23	42	82.60%	7.45
Erie	26	6	-76.90%	2.16
Franklin	2	5	150.00%	3.25
Indiana	2	3	50.00%	3.45
Lancaster	12	19	58.30%	3.54
Lebanon	0	3	NA	2.19
Luzerne	4	12	200.00%	3.77
Lycoming	2	4	100.00%	3.45
Mifflin	2	4	100.00%	8.6
Montgomery	21	26	23.80%	3.17
Northampton	7	9	28.60%	2.99
Northumberland	2	4	100.00%	4.29
Philadelphia	314	427	36.00%	27.24
Westmoreland	3	5	66.70%	1.4

In response to the recent increase in reported P&S syphilis, PADOH recommends special testing precautions for all pregnant women be taken in the following counties: **Adams; Allegheny; Armstrong; Bucks; Cambria; Centre; Chester; Dauphin; Delaware; Erie; Franklin; Indiana; Lancaster; Lebanon; Luzerne; Lycoming; Mifflin; Montgomery; Northampton; Northumberland; Philadelphia; and Westmoreland counties.** 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 this health advisory 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 or conditions should be 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; and/or
- A recent positive test for another sexually transmitted disease such as gonorrhea or chlamydia.

### **Special Note for Philadelphia County**

As a reminder, Philadelphia County has an established requirement in place that all OB/GYN providers within Philadelphia County are required to perform syphilis testing on pregnant females:

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

### **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 – 2015,” that is available on the internet at [www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/](http://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 and a nationwide shortage of the drug, 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 PADOH for treatment assistance.

### **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](http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment)

Up-to-date information on the nationwide shortage of Benzathine penicillin G is available online at: [www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/drugnotices/bicillinshortage.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/drugnotices/bicillinshortage.htm).

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; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of May 10, 2017, but may be modified in the future.