

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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

DATE:	April 2, 2018
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Rachel Levine, MD, Acting Secretary of Health and Physician General
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” 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 (DOH) is providing the following update in response to counties that have reported a case rate of Primary and Secondary (P&S) Syphilis that exceeds the statewide 2017 threshold case rate of 2.0 cases per 100,000 population (see table below).

CDC Reporting County	2017 Total Primary and Secondary Syphilis Cases	2017 Primary and Secondary Syphilis Case Rate Per 100,000 Population
Allegheny	60	4.90
Beaver*	3	1.79
Berks	12	2.89
Blair	5	4.01
Bucks	17	2.71
Carbon	4	6.29
Columbia	2	3.01
Cumberland	12	4.83
Dauphin	29	10.60
Delaware	38	6.74

Elk	1	3.28
Indiana	3	3.47
Lancaster	17	3.16
Lebanon	5	3.60
Lehigh	16	4.41
McKean	2	4.78
Montgomery	29	3.53
Philadelphia	459	29.28
York	19	4.28

In response to these higher case rates in reported P&S Syphilis, the DOH is recommending special testing precautions for all pregnant women be taken in the following counties: **Allegheny, Beaver*, Berks, Blair, Bucks, Carbon, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Elk, Indiana, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, McKean, Montgomery, Philadelphia, and York 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.

***Special Note on Beaver County:** Beaver County has been included in this listing due to a significant increase in HIV and syphilis cases in early 2018. In addition in early 2018, Beaver County also reported the state’s first congenital syphilis death of the year.

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 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
- 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/ .

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 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

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 April 2, 2018, but may be modified in the future.
