

**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
**2018 - PAHAN-426-10-17 - ADV**  
**Historic Increase in Reported Congenital Syphilis**



<b>DATE:</b>	October 17, 2018
<b>TO:</b>	Health Alert Network
<b>FROM:</b>	Dr. Rachel Levine, Secretary of Health
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Historic Increase in Reported Congenital Syphilis</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 MEMBERS

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is providing the following update in response to a significant increase in Congenital Syphilis cases in 2018. As of October 1, 2018, a total of 6 congenital syphilis cases were reported in the state (PA exclusive of Philadelphia) which represents the highest number of cases in more than 24 years. Additionally, 3 of these cases were reported in the Lehigh Valley.

In response to the recent increase in Congenital Syphilis, DOH continues to recommend special testing precautions for all pregnant women be taken in the following counties: **Allegheny, Berks, Blair, Bucks, Carbon, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Elk, Indiana, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Northampton, McKean, Montgomery, Philadelphia, and York Counties**. DOH is recommending pregnant females in the impacted counties be offered a test for syphilis in the following situations:

- At the first prenatal visit;
- 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 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, chlamydia, HIV or Hepatitis C.

### **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, 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.

### **Special Note for Sexually Active Females of Child Bearing Age:**

Due to the recent spike in congenital syphilis cases and a general increase of reported STDs among females, DOH is recommending statewide that all sexually active females of child bearing age be routinely screened for HIV, Syphilis, Gonorrhea and Chlamydia. Females who do not have insurance, or are under insured, can receive free and confidential HIV and STD testing services at any of the statewide STD clinics. For a current list of free and confidential HIV

and STD testing sites, please go online at  
<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/programs/STD/Pages/STD.aspx>

### **Additional Information**

Physicians needing additional information are asked to call the following number: (717) 787-3981.

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)

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 October 17, 2018 but may be modified in the future.
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