

Nationwide Shortage of Penicillin G benzathine (Bicillin L-A®)

DATE:	August 1, 2023
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Debra L. Bogen, M.D., FAAP, Acting Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Nationwide Shortage of Penicillin G benzathine (Bicillin L-A®)
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	N/A
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, 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; **LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES:** PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, INFECTION CONTROL, AND NURSING STAFF IN YOUR FACILITY

Summary

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) has been notified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that there is a [nationwide shortage](#) of Benzathine Penicillin G (Bicillin L-A®)
- Providers should prioritize the use of Bicillin L-A® for individuals who are infected with or suspected of having syphilis **and** who are pregnant or have HIV.
- Providers should use Doxycycline 100mg PO BID for two (2) weeks (for early syphilis) or four (4) weeks (for late latent or syphilis of unknown duration) as the alternative treatment for nonpregnant persons and individuals who do not have HIV.
- Providers who are having difficulty obtaining Bicillin L-A® for prioritized patients should contact the PA DOH, STD Program at (717) 787-3981 to arrange for appropriate treatment.

Current Situation

PA DOH was notified by the CDC that there is currently a nationwide shortage of Benzathine Penicillin G (Bicillin L-A®). Manufacturers are estimating that the Bicillin L-A® will be in short supply or unavailable through late calendar year 2023. For additional information on this national shortage, please go to www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/drug-notice.htm

Treatment Recommendations

- In response to this nationwide shortage, PA DOH requests that all medical providers limit the use of Benzathine Penicillin G (Bicillin L-A®) to the following individuals:
 - Newly infected pregnant individuals with a confirmed positive test for syphilis.

- Pregnant individuals who require preventive treatment due to exposure to a known syphilis case with the last 90 days.
- Individuals newly infected with syphilis who also have HIV.
- If inventory allows, treat patients with primary and secondary syphilis who are unlikely to be adherent to an oral regimen.
- Parenteral Benzathine penicillin G is the only therapy with documented efficacy that is safe to use during pregnancy. Pregnant individuals with syphilis in any stage who are penicillin allergic should be desensitized and treated with Benzathine penicillin.
- Until this nationwide shortage is resolved, PA DOH recommends that all other individuals who are infected or exposed to syphilis be treated based on the following 2015 CDC Alternative Treatment Recommendation ([Syphilis - STI Treatment Guidelines \(cdc.gov\)](http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/guidelines)):
 - Primary, Secondary, or Early Latent Syphilis(<1 year): 100 mg Doxycycline BID X 14 Days
 - Latent Syphilis (>1 year): 100 mg Doxycycline BID X 28 Days
- Providers who are having difficulty obtaining Benzathine penicillin G (Bicillin L-A®) for priority patients should contact PA DOH at (717) 787-3981 for assistance.

Client Follow-up

- Clients who received the alternative Doxycycline treatment are recommended to have a clinical and serologic evaluation performed at 3, 6, and 12 months after treatment; more frequent evaluation might be prudent if follow-up is uncertain or if repeat infection is a concern.
- Serologic response (i.e., titer) should be compared with the titer at the time of treatment. However, assessing serologic response to treatment can be difficult, and definitive criteria for cure or failure are not well established. In addition, nontreponemal test titers might decline more slowly for persons previously treated for syphilis.

Management of Sex Partners

- Persons who had sexual contact with a person who receives a diagnosis of primary, secondary, or early latent syphilis <90 days before the diagnosis, should be treated presumptively for early syphilis, even if serologic test results are negative or unknown.
- Persons who had sexual contact with a person who receives a diagnosis of primary, secondary, or early latent syphilis >90 days before the diagnosis, should be treated presumptively for early syphilis if serologic test results are not immediately available and the opportunity for follow-up is uncertain. If serologic tests are negative, no treatment is needed. If serologic tests are positive, treatment should be based on clinical and serologic evaluation and syphilis stage.
- Long-term sex partners of persons who have late latent syphilis should be evaluated clinically and serologically for syphilis and treated based on the findings.

Reporting Requirements

PA DOH requires all providers and laboratories to electronically report all diseases, infections and conditions listed in 28 Pa. Code Chapter 27, Subchapter B (relating to reporting of diseases, infections, and conditions) through its electronic disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS. Reporting requirements are that providers report the diagnosis of and treatments for STD cases. Providers not registered for PA-NEDSS can do so by contacting the PA-NEDSS Security Officer by email at RA-DHNESSACCTREQ@pa.gov or by phone at 717-783-9171.

Additional Information

For up-to-date information on the Benzathine Penicillin G (Bicillin L-A®) shortage, providers are encouraged to review the following information online at: www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/drug-notice.htm

Additional information on syphilis testing and treatment for pregnant individuals is found online at: www.cdc.gov/std/treatment

Physicians who need additional information should 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

Individuals interested in receiving future PA-HANs can register at HAN Notification Registration (mir3.com)

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 August 1, 2023 but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.