

Delaware Health Advisory #510: Prevent Congenital Syphilis by Screening and Treating Pregnant People

Summary

The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is sending this health advisory to advise clinicians and health care partners of the need to ensure timely syphilis screening and treatment in pregnant people. DPH also wishes to advise that it has doses of penicillin G benzathine (Bicillin L-A) on hand for the treatment of pregnant people only.

Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has noted a significant increase in the rates of syphilis across the country. Along with this has been a large uptick in the cases of congenital syphilis. Delaware similarly has seen a rise in the rates of syphilis and congenital syphilis over the past few years.

Congenital syphilis is a preventable disease that if undiagnosed and/or inadequately treated leads to significant morbidity and mortality. Outcomes of syphilis infection in utero include pregnancy loss, stillbirth, prematurity, low birth weight, early infant death, and damage of multiple organs in infants born with congenital syphilis. Early diagnosis and adequate treatment of pregnant people is crucial to prevent congenital syphilis.

There has been a nationwide shortage of penicillin G benzathine (Bicillin L-A) which is the only recommended treatment for syphilis in pregnancy. However, the Delaware Division of Public Health has been able to obtain a limited supply of penicillin G benzathine and has this available for the treatment of pregnant people only.

Recommendations for Providers

Providers are urged to support the prevention and detection of congenital syphilis by taking the following steps:

1. As recommended by the CDC, test pregnant people for syphilis during the first prenatal visit (particularly if no prior syphilis test during the current pregnancy).
2. Retest for syphilis at 28 weeks and at delivery for persons at high risk for syphilis acquisition in pregnancy.
3. For providers who may not provide prenatal care but who conduct pregnancy tests, consider screening for syphilis in any person who has a positive pregnancy test.
4. Counsel pregnant people on the importance of practicing safe sex during pregnancy including using condoms and limiting sexual partners.
5. If unable to obtain penicillin G benzathine to treat a pregnant person who has syphilis, contact DPH by emailing reportdisease@delaware.gov and by calling one of the following numbers to connect the patient to our public health clinics for treatment.
 - New Castle County — Hudson State Service Center: 302-283-7551
 - Kent County — Williams State Service Center: 302-857-5150
 - Sussex County — Adams State Service Center: 302-515-3174

Note: Only call these numbers for currently pregnant persons diagnosed with syphilis.

6. Continue to report all cases of syphilis (pregnant or not) to DPH
7. For non-pregnant persons diagnosed with syphilis, consider alternative treatments as outlined by the CDC at [P&S Syphilis - STI Treatment Guidelines \(cdc.gov\)](#)
8. Contact DPH with any questions about syphilis diagnosis, treatment, or obtaining penicillin G benzathine for your pregnant patient. Email reportdisease@delaware.gov or call the STD program at 302-744-1048.

Resources

- [Syphilis - STI Treatment Guidelines \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- [P&S Syphilis - STI Treatment Guidelines \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- [Syphilis During Pregnancy - STI Treatment Guidelines \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- [CDC Laboratory Recommendations for Syphilis Testing, United States, 2024 | MMWR](#)
- [STD Facts - Congenital Syphilis \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- [2022 U.S. Syphilis Cases Reach Highest Numbers Since the 1950s | NCHHSTP Newsroom | CDC](#)