



# Health Alert

October 29, 2019

## Increase in Syphilis Cases among Women in Contra Costa County

### Situational Update

Contra Costa County has experienced steep increases in syphilis cases over the past 4 years, including in women of reproductive age (15-44). This concerning trend has been accompanied by an increase in congenital syphilis cases (from zero to four) and one stillbirth. **Prevention of congenital syphilis is an urgent public health matter.** Congenital syphilis can cause severe illness in babies, including premature birth, low birth weight, birth defects, blindness, and hearing loss. It can also lead to stillbirth and infant death. Congenital syphilis can be prevented if the mother is diagnosed and treated appropriately and without delay.

Based on preliminary analysis of surveillance data from 2014 to 2018, early syphilis has gone up by 124% in the county, and by 150% in reproductive-age women.

### Actions Requested of Clinicians

1. **Syphilis, in any stage, when diagnosed, suspected, or treated, is reportable to the local health department within 24 hours of identification.** To report a case to Contra Costa County, fax a completed Confidential Morbidity Report (CMR) to **925-313-6758**. For questions regarding STD reporting, call the STD Control Program at **925-313-6750**. Inform patients with positive syphilis test results that someone from the Public Health Department may reach out to them regarding their results and to conduct partner services.
2. **For ALL pregnant women, test for syphilis at least twice** during pregnancy: 1) at the first clinical encounter (ideally during the first trimester), and 2) during the third trimester (ideally between 28-32 weeks gestation). **Women with risk factors for syphilis should be tested a third time at delivery.** Risk factors for syphilis in women include substance use (particularly methamphetamine), current or history of homelessness, sex work, sex in exchange for money, housing, or drugs, intimate partner violence, a history of incarceration, or sex with a partner who may be at risk for syphilis.
3. Screen all infants born to mothers with syphilis infections during pregnancy prior to discharging them from the hospital. A current congenital syphilis evaluation and treatment tool is available from the California Prevention Training Center: [https://californiaptc.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CS-Algorithm\\_RRA-approved\\_CDPHCAPTC\\_revised-2.12.19\\_AD-1.pdf](https://californiaptc.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CS-Algorithm_RRA-approved_CDPHCAPTC_revised-2.12.19_AD-1.pdf)
4. **Benzathine penicillin G** is the recommended treatment for syphilis, and the only recommended treatment for pregnant women with syphilis. Treatment of syphilis in pregnancy is nearly 100% effective at preventing the potentially devastating outcomes associated with congenital syphilis, but it must be administered promptly and correctly.

The 2015 CDC treatment guidelines are available online: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/congenital.htm>

Contra Costa County's STD CMR is available online: [https://cchealth.org/cd/pdf/cmr\\_std\\_110a.pdf](https://cchealth.org/cd/pdf/cmr_std_110a.pdf)