



Philadelphia Department of Public Health  
**Division of Disease Control**

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## ***Health Alert***

### **New Syphilis Screening Recommendations February 24, 2010**

In 2009, the STD Control Program, Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) saw dramatic increases in cases of syphilis. These include a 44% increase in all early cases, and a 238% increase in primary and secondary cases in females. Many of the cases in females occurred in adolescents and young adults aged 15-24 years old. In addition, syphilis continues to disproportionately affect men who have sex with men (MSM), accounting for 69% of primary and secondary syphilis cases in males.

In response to these increases, PDPH is now recommending that serologic testing for syphilis (RPR or VDRL) should routinely be performed:

- Annually for females aged 15-40 years who had more than 1 sexual partner in the preceding year
- Every three to four months for sexually active MSM
- For all patients presenting with symptoms of ANY sexually transmitted infection (STI), including gonorrhea or Chlamydia
- For all patients presenting with a positive test for ANY STI
- For all patients with known exposure to any STI
- For all patients with multiple sex partners
- For all patients who exchange sex for money or drugs

In addition, by Regulation, all pregnant women in Philadelphia **MUST** be screened for syphilis at each of the following times:

- First prenatal encounter
- During the third trimester of pregnancy
- At delivery of a liveborn or stillborn child

PDPH stresses that a medical encounter with a pregnant female in any setting, including Family Planning clinics, emergency departments, and other non-obstetric settings, **should be considered a prenatal encounter**. PDPH receives reports of ALL positive syphilis tests in Philadelphia and will locate patients with positive test results who do not return for care.

Patients with syphilis and their sex partners should be treated with benzathine penicillin 2.4 million units IM, for primary, secondary and early latent syphilis. Patients with late latent syphilis or syphilis of unknown duration should be treated with benzathine penicillin 2.4 million units IM weekly for 3 weeks. Additional information regarding the diagnosis and treatment of syphilis is available at [www.cdc.gov/std/treatment](http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment), [www.stdphilly.org](http://www.stdphilly.org), or by calling PDPH at 215-685-6740.

**All patients with syphilis should be reported immediately to PDPH at 215-685-6737.**

Message #: PDPH-HAN-00129A-02-24-10

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