



COUNTY OF MONTEREY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Behavioral Health Emergency Medical Services Public Administrator/Public Guardian
Environmental Health/Animal Services

Nationally Accredited for Providing Quality Health Services

Health Advisory

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Syphilis Increasing Among Pregnant Women and Women of Childbearing Age in Monterey County

Current Situation

Syphilis incidence has been increasing in Monterey County since 2010. Until recently, men who have sex with men and men who have sex with both men and women made up nearly 100% of reported syphilis in Monterey County. Beginning in 2015, Monterey County Health Officials have noted an increase in the number of women being diagnosed with syphilis in Monterey County. In 2017, approximately 9% of syphilis cases occurred among women in Monterey County. This proportion rose to 23% in 2018. Approximately 90% of these women were also pregnant or of child-bearing age. Since 2015, 5 infants have been born with congenital syphilis. Prior to 2015, there had been no congenital syphilis in Monterey County for over 10 years.

Recommendations for Healthcare Providers

- **Order blood tests for syphilis.** Syphilis serology testing should include a nontreponemal test (RPR or VDRL) with automatic reflex titer using a specific treponemal test (TP-PA or FTA-ABS) if the screen is positive.
 - Pregnant women should be screened for syphilis at their first prenatal care visit. Testing should be repeated during the third trimester and at delivery for women who are at high risk for syphilis.
 - Sexually active gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men should be screened annually or sooner following disclosure of high-risk sexual activity.
- **Follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) guidelines for treatment.** Detailed guidelines are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/syphilis.htm>.
 - All providers are encouraged to treat patients and their partners in their practice. Family PACT, Medi-Cal, and private insurances normally cover testing and treatment for syphilis.
 - An algorithm for evaluating infants born to women with syphilis can be found on the California Department of Public Health's website at https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Congenital_Syphilis_Algorithm.pdf.

Health Alert: Warrants immediate action or attention. **Health Advisory:** Provides 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

- **All patients with syphilis should be tested for HIV if not already known to be HIV positive.**
 - Approximately half of all men who have sex with men who are reported with early syphilis in Monterey County are also positive for HIV. Women who have sex with bisexual men are also at increased risk for HIV infection.
 - HIV negative individuals with syphilis may benefit from HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), depending on their risk behaviors. For assistance with prescribing PrEP or linking your patients to a PrEP provider, please call Evelyn Alvarez, Monterey County HIV Programs Coordinator, at 831-755-4626.
- **Promptly report all suspected syphilis cases to the Health Department’s Communicable Disease Unit (phone: 831-755-4521; fax: 831-775-8076).** Staff can also assist with interpreting syphilis lab results, obtaining prior syphilis testing and treatment history, and providing treatment guidelines.

For additional information about syphilis, please contact the Communicable Disease Unit at 831-755-4521, visit the Monterey County Health Department’s website at www.mtyhd.org, or visit the CDC’s provider website: www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/. For consultation regarding clinical management of syphilis, log on to www.STDCCN.org for a free consultation.