



Gavin Newsom
Mayor

TO: San Francisco Medical Providers
RE: Recommendation against azithromycin treatment for syphilis
DATE: January 10, 2005

Dear San Francisco Medical Provider:

The 2002 CDC STD Treatment Guidelines recommend that primary, secondary, and early latent syphilis be treated with a single dose of intramuscular penicillin (doxycycline or tetracycline have been used as alternatives in penicillin-allergic patients). In the past decade, several small clinical trials showed that 2 grams of oral azithromycin was clinically effective for syphilis treatment, and 1 gram of oral azithromycin was effective for epidemiologic treatment (prophylaxis) of exposed partners. In February 2004, we notified you of several azithromycin treatment failures among syphilis-infected patients. We continue to monitor prevalence of the azithromycin-resistant syphilis strains and during 2004, resistance was found in over 40% of tested specimens.

We do not recommend azithromycin treatment for patients infected with syphilis or their sex partners. The San Francisco metropolitan STD clinic (City Clinic) is treating patients with primary, secondary, and early latent syphilis, and their sex partners, with benzathine penicillin G (2.4 million units IM). For penicillin-allergic patients, doxycycline (100 mg PO bid x 14 days) or tetracycline (500 mg qid PO x 14 days) is recommended. All patients should have close follow-up to verify clinical and laboratory improvement.

For further information, please see the "Syphilis Management" section on the San Francisco City Clinic website (www.sfcityclinic.org/providers), or refer to the 2002 CDC STD Treatment Guidelines (www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/TOC2002TG.htm).

Thank you for helping keep San Francisco healthy.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey D. Klausner in black ink.

Jeffrey D. Klausner, MD, MPH
Director
STD Prevention and Control Services

Handwritten signature of Samuel J. Mitchell in black ink.

Samuel J. Mitchell, MD, PhD
EIS Officer
STD Prevention and Control Services