



Health Update:

Expanded Syphilis Screening Recommendations and Resolution of Benzathine Penicillin G Shortage

January 23, 2025

Situational Update

Expanded syphilis screening recommendations

Since 2017, there has been a 237% increase in San Francisco of reported syphilis cases among cisgender women (from 60 to 202 total cases), the majority of whom were of childbearing age. In 2023, there were six congenital syphilis (CS) cases in San Francisco, the highest number in 30 years.

On October 14, 2024, in response to statewide increases in CS, the [California Department of Public Health](#) (CDPH) expanded its syphilis screening recommendations; SFDPH has aligned with this guidance. We provide a summary of these recommendations below and encourage clinicians to adopt them to ensure detection, timely treatment, and prevention of CS.

Nationwide Bicillin L-A[®] shortage has resolved

[As of September 2024](#), the nationwide shortage of benzathine penicillin G [Bicillin LA] 1.2 mu and 2.4 mu IM has resolved, and Bicillin L-A[®] should be used for all appropriate patients per SFDPH and [CDC's standard guidance](#).

Actions Requested of Clinicians

1. Adopt the following expanded CDPH syphilis screening recommendations:

- **Screen all sexually active people 15-44 years old for syphilis at least once in their lifetime**, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.
 - All people 15-44 years old entering a **correctional facility** should be screened for syphilis at intake.
 - Screen for syphilis whenever a person of any age is tested for HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including mpox.
- **Offer syphilis testing annually to people who have risk factors for syphilis.**
 - Risk factors include unstable housing and homelessness; substance use (particularly methamphetamine use); sex work; sex in exchange for money, housing or drugs; intimate partner violence; a history of incarceration; sex with a partner who may be at risk for syphilis or HIV; and history of a STI in the past year.
 - Obtain updated cell phone numbers, email, and for people experiencing homelessness, the locations where they often spend time.



- **Screen all pregnant people for syphilis three times during each pregnancy:** 1) at the first clinical encounter, ideally during the first trimester; 2) early in third trimester, ideally at 28 weeks gestation or soon after; and 3) at delivery.
 - Infants should not be discharged from the hospital unless the birthing person has been tested for syphilis at least once since the start of that pregnancy.
 - Screen all pregnant persons for syphilis who are seen in the **Emergency Department** or **hospital-affiliated urgent care** who do not have a documented syphilis test during pregnancy.

2. Treat syphilis immediately, encourage partner services, report syphilis cases to SFDPH:

- **Treat clinically suspected or diagnosed syphilis immediately** with penicillin (benzathine penicillin G [Bicillin LA] 2.4 mu IM) which is also the only therapy proven to be effective in pregnancy.
- **Refer sex partners for testing and treatment.**
 - Anyone who had sex with a person within the 90 days preceding that person's diagnosis and treatment of syphilis should be tested for syphilis and immediately treated empirically, even if test results are negative or pending.
 - Inform patients that the [SFDPH LINCS team](#) may reach out to them to help partners get tested and treated. LINCS partner services are voluntary and offered by skilled and client-centered SFDPH staff. Encourage patients to work with LINCS as it helps prevent syphilis transmission in San Francisco.
- **Immediately call the [SFDPH LINCS team](#)** at 628-217-6688 if you diagnose or suspect syphilis in a pregnant person and **report all syphilis cases by faxing [a confidential morbidity report](#)** to 415-431-4628.

3. Offer doxy-PEP and HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to those eligible. Review the SFDPH [doxy-PEP prescribing guide](#) for more eligibility criteria and counseling messages.

Additional Resources

Important Phone Numbers:

- SFDPH syphilis titer and treatment history & LINCS partner services referrals: 628-217-6688
- San Francisco City Clinic provider line for clinical questions: 628-217-6677
- San Francisco City Clinic PrEP line: 628-217-6692
- Refer pregnant people experiencing homelessness, with active substance use disorders, or other barriers to care to ZSFG-based [Team Lily](#): 415-802-7615 or email Rebecca.schwartz@ucsf.edu.

Other Resources:

- [San Francisco Citywide STI and HIV Screening Guidelines](#)



- [San Francisco City Clinic Clinical Protocols, Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)
- [California Department of Public Health Updated Syphilis Screening Recommendations](#)
- [CDC 2021 STI Treatment Guidelines](#) & download the CDC Treatment Guideline App

Contact information

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