



To: CAHAN San Diego Participants

Date: October 18, 2024

From: Public Health Services

Health Advisory: Updated California Syphilis Screening Recommendations

Key Messages

- California is issuing updated syphilis serologic screening recommendations in response to rising syphilis and congenital syphilis rates in the state.
- All sexually active persons aged 15-44 years, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, should be screened for syphilis at least once in their lifetime and offered screening annually.
- Syphilis testing should be included whenever a person of any age is tested for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or other sexually transmitted infections, including mpox.
- All pregnant persons should be screened for syphilis three times: 1) at confirmation of pregnancy or first prenatal encounter, 2) early in the third trimester (at approximately 28 weeks gestation or as soon as possible thereafter), and 3) at delivery.
- All persons aged 15-44 years who enter a correctional facility should ideally be screened for syphilis, preferably at intake.
- Emergency departments and hospital-affiliated urgent care clinics should screen all pregnant people for syphilis prior to discharge if syphilis test results are not available for the current pregnancy.

Situation

On October 14, 2024, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued [updated syphilis serologic screening recommendations](#) in response to rising syphilis and congenital syphilis (CS) rates in the state. These recommendations are applicable statewide, regardless of local case rates.

Background

In 2020, the CDPH Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Control Branch released [Expanded Syphilis Screening Recommendations for the Prevention of Congenital Syphilis](#) to enable more timely identification and treatment of new syphilis infections in people who are or could become pregnant. Despite these efforts, syphilis rates in adults/adolescents and CS rose by 131 and 125 percent, respectively, from 2020 through 2022. In San Diego County, the overall rate of syphilis of any stage increased by 19.5% from 54.4 to 65.0 cases per 100,000 population from 2020 to 2022. The rate of CS increased by 144.6% from 35.9 to 87.8 cases per 100,000 live births from 2020 to 2022. There have been twelve syphilitic stillbirths reported in the region from 2013 to 2022.

For further background information and rationale for the updated syphilis screening recommendations, as well as a crosswalk comparing prior and updated CDPH syphilis screening recommendations, please see the [October 14, 2024 CDPH health alert](#).

Actions Requested

1. **Screen** all sexually active persons 15-44 years old, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, for syphilis at least once in their lifetime. Following the initial screen, CDPH recommends that syphilis screening be offered annually.
2. **Include** syphilis testing whenever a person of any age is tested for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or other sexually transmitted infections, including mpox.
3. **Screen** pregnant people for syphilis three times: 1) at confirmation of pregnancy or the first prenatal encounter, 2) early in the third trimester (at approximately 28 weeks gestation or as soon as possible thereafter), and 3) at delivery.
4. **Screen** all persons 15-44 years old who enter a correctional facility for syphilis, preferably at intake.
5. **Screen** all pregnant persons for syphilis prior to discharge from an emergency department or hospital-affiliated urgent care clinic if syphilis test results are not available for the current pregnancy.
6. **Consider** empirically treating for syphilis while awaiting confirmatory testing, if clinically indicated, among persons who have preliminary positive treponemal or non-treponemal test results, particularly if the likelihood of successful patient follow-up is uncertain.
7. **Report** new syphilis cases within one working day to the HIV, STD, and Hepatitis Branch by faxing a Confidential Morbidity Report to (619) 692-8541 or via encrypted e-mail to PHS-HSHB-STDReporting-Fax.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov.

Resources

[Health Update – Updates to Syphilis Screening Recommendations, 10/14/24 \(CDPH\)](#)
[Expanded Syphilis Screening Recommendations for the Prevention of Congenital Syphilis, 2020 \(CDPH\)](#)
[Sexually Transmitted Infections Treatment Guidelines, 2021 \(CDC\)](#)
[Laboratory Recommendations for Syphilis Testing, United States, 2024 \(CDC\)](#)

Thank you for your participation.

CAHAN San Diego

County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency

HIV, STD, and Hepatitis Branch

Phone (for providers, M-F 8AM-5PM): (619) 692-5500 (referrals for mpox evaluation, testing, and/or treatment), (619) 609-3245 (clinical consultations for challenging cases); Fax: (619) 692-8541

E-mail: cahan@sdcounty.ca.gov

Secure Website: <https://cahan.ca.gov>

Public Website: <http://www.cahansandiego.com>