

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Ron DeSantis
Governor

Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD
State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

NEED FOR SYPHILIS SCREENING

November 18, 2019

Dear Colleague:

The burden of syphilis and other bacterial sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is growing in Florida. In 2018, nearly 150,000 cases of syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia were reported. Case reports of early syphilis have increased by 91% in the past five years.

Reported cases of all stages of syphilis have risen dramatically and include increases among females of childbearing age and infants. Between 2014 and 2018, congenital syphilis case reports more than doubled from 48 to 108 cases; an increase of approximately 125 percent. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), up to 40 percent of babies born to women with untreated syphilis may be stillborn or die from the infection as a newborn. Infants with syphilis can have seizures, infections, deformed bones, anemia, enlarged liver and spleen, jaundice, blindness and hearing impairment in the first few weeks after birth. The only CDC recommended treatment for syphilis in pregnancy is Benzathine Penicillin G (Bicillin-LA). If the patient is allergic to penicillin, desensitization is advised.

Given the increase in congenital syphilis and other STDs during pregnancy, including HIV, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists and CDC recommend providers screen all pregnant women for syphilis, HIV, gonorrhea, chlamydia and hepatitis B at their first and third trimester visit and at delivery. Routine screening for STDs in the first and third trimester is not only a good practice, it is required by Florida Administrative Code Rule 64D-3.042, STD Testing Related to Pregnancy, [www://flrules.elaws.us/fac/64d-3.042/](http://www.flrules.com/elaws/view.asp?f=64D-3.042).

Screening of pregnant women for syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B and other STDs is arguably the most important step in preventing adverse pregnancy outcomes. Timely disease identification and treatment is paramount to protect the developing fetus from these dangerous pathogens that often lead to adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Health care providers play a critical role in identifying and reducing transmission of STDs by offering routine screening for all at-risk clients. We urge all practicing clinicians to be on heightened alert and screen all patients for syphilis and other STDs if there is an indication of symptoms or high-risk behavior.

For further information about syphilis and other STDs in your area, please contact Florida Department of Health, STD and Viral Hepatitis Section at (850) 245-4303, or visit our website at: [www:floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/sexually-transmitted-diseases/index.html](http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/sexually-transmitted-diseases/index.html)

Sincerely,

Scott A. Rivkees, MD
State Surgeon General