



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**
Michelle Morse, MD, MPH
Acting Health Commissioner

Congenital Syphilis Prevention Services for Pregnant Patients

- Reported cases of congenital syphilis are increasing in New York City.
- Screen for syphilis three times during all pregnancies, as required by law, and ensure timely treatment for people who test positive.
- Encourage patient engagement with New York City Health Department staff who routinely provide patient follow-up and additional referrals for sexual health care.

May 1, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

Over the last several years, there has been an alarming increase in congenital syphilis cases in New York City. Congenital syphilis can result in devastating health outcomes, including stillbirth, preterm birth, and early infant death. Infants with an infection can be asymptomatic at birth and develop serious health issues in the neonatal period or later in life.

We need your help to improve timely testing and appropriate treatment of syphilis in pregnant people to prevent congenital syphilis infections. The [New York City Health Code](#) and [New York State Public Health Law](#) require health care providers to screen pregnant people for syphilis three times during pregnancy as outlined below.

In 2023, 38% of people in NYC who gave birth to an infant with congenital syphilis had non-timely or no documented tests during pregnancy. Of those who gave birth and received timely testing, 38% had inadequate, no, or nondocumented treatment.

Syphilis screening during pregnancy also provides an opportunity to receive other important information and services, such as recommended HIV screening and presumptive treatment of sex partners with syphilis.

The NYC Health Department recommends that prenatal care providers take the following actions:

- **Screen for syphilis three times during pregnancy.**
 - Screen all patients:
 - At first prenatal care examination,
 - Between 28 to 32 weeks' gestation, and
 - At delivery.
 - More frequent screening during pregnancy may be warranted based on discussions about sexual health and a shared clinical decision-making process with the patient. Standard serologic screening for syphilis during pregnancy includes both the traditional (beginning

with a quantitative nontreponemal test) and reverse screening algorithms (beginning with a treponemal antibody test). For additional diagnostic considerations, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [STI Treatment Guidelines](#).

- **Provide appropriate treatment for syphilis infections.** People who are pregnant and syphilis should be treated with parenteral Penicillin G, with a regimen informed by their specific stage of infection, as per CDC [STI Treatment Guidelines](#).
 - Licensed New York State health care providers can request a patient's syphilis testing and treatment history from the [NYC Syphilis Registry](#), which is important for contextualizing serologic results. If a pregnant patient reports prior treatment but does not have documentation of that treatment, and NYC Health Department staff are unable to confirm treatment, consider treating for a presumed untreated infection.
 - Penicillin G is the only known effective antimicrobial for preventing maternal transmission to the fetus. Pregnant people who have a history of penicillin allergy must be desensitized and treated with penicillin. For assistance with treatment decisions, call the Health Department's Provider Access Line at 866-692-3641.
- **Engage with NYC Health Department staff.** NYC Health Department staff are trained to prevent and respond to reported syphilis infections in people who are pregnant. They may call you to ensure that a patient has received adequate treatment and obtain additional medical history. While following principles of strict confidentiality, these staff contact people diagnosed with syphilis to ensure they are linked to treatment and other supportive services. They also confidentially follow up with their sex partners to ensure that those individuals are tested and treated to prevent ongoing transmission or reinfections. Encourage your patients who are diagnosed with syphilis to respond to their phone calls or text messages.
- **[Report](#) all syphilis cases to the NYC Health Department within 24 hours as required by law.**

For more information, visit the Health Department's [congenital syphilis webpage](#).

We appreciate your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,



Preeti Pathela, DrPH, MPH
Executive Director, Sexually Transmitted Infections Program
Bureau of Hepatitis, HIV, and Sexually Transmitted Infections