

18 May 2015

Public Health Advisory

Intended for primary care providers, HIV/infectious disease specialists, ophthalmologists, optometrists, and other eye care providers.

There have been clusters of ocular syphilis in Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Several cases have resulted in a significant and permanent decline in visual acuity.

- Currently, Pima County has not identified any case of ocular syphilis.
- Providers should be vigilant for ocular syphilis, particularly in men who have sex with men and HIV-infected persons.

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF CLINICIANS

1. ***Have a discussion with patients presenting with visual complaints.*** The most common eye finding in ocular syphilis is uveitis; optic neuropathy, keratitis and retinal vasculitis can also occur. Assess suspect patients for genital, oral, or anal ulcers or rash presentations that may be related to syphilis. If present, consider testing for syphilis (VDRL or RPR). Contact our staff for assistance with referrals, resources and follow-up.
2. ***Ask patients with known or suspected syphilis about changes in vision, hearing, and/or headaches to identify potential cases of ocular, otologic, or neurosyphilis.***
3. ***Refer suspect patients promptly for further evaluation.*** Refer patients with syphilis and ocular complaints for immediate ophthalmologic evaluation, preferably to a retinal specialist. Syphilis patients with non-specific neurologic complaints, as well as those with ophthalmologic or otologic complaints may require a lumbar puncture to evaluate for neurosyphilis.
4. ***Promptly treat patients with ocular syphilis according to CDC guidelines for CNS syphilis, regardless of lumbar puncture results*** (i.e. intravenous penicillin G or intramuscular procaine penicillin plus oral probenidol for 10-14 days) (see: www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2010/default.htm).
5. ***Report suspected syphilis cases within 24 hours of identification.*** Call (520) 724-3916 or fax a communicable disease report to (520) 770-4242. (Downloadable form available at www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/investigations/forms.htm. Please note if ocular syphilis is confirmed or suspected.)

Pima County syphilis cases: The majority of cases are occurring among men who have sex with men, and 1 in 3 are HIV-infected. In general, cases are White and Hispanic, under age 40, and many use websites/mobile applications to meet partners for anonymous sex. These men may not identify as “gay”, may also be in heterosexual, therefore clinicians need to have a high index of suspicion.

- More information on syphilis in Pima County can be found at our website [HIV and Sexually Transmitted Diseases - Pima County](#)
- Current evidence-based screening, treatment strategies, and recommendations are available through the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/default.htm

The Health Department is available to assist you in the care and follow up of infected individuals. We are able to contact patients for follow-up staging and treatment, notify partners for testing and treatment, and provide clinical support to you. As a community clinician you represent the front line in the identification and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. Your partnership is essential to decrease syphilis in Pima County.

Clinicians who need further assistance can call us at (520) 724-3916. If you would like to continue to receive alerts about public health issues in Pima County please send an email to HDCommunicate@Pima.gov.

Respectfully,



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Director & Chief Medical Office



Paul Horwitz, MD
Chair of the Board of Health