



08 August 2014

## **PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT**

**Pima County is experiencing an increase in the number of syphilis cases.** The majority of cases are occurring among men who have sex with men, and 1 of 3 are HIV+. In general, cases are White and Hispanic, under age 40, and many use websites/mobile applications to meet partners for anonymous sex.

Pima County Health Department is encouraging health care providers to:

**Think SYPHILIS!** Recognition requires a heightened index of suspicion.

- **Primary syphilis** occurs typically 10-90 days post exposure. Lesions are single, painless ulcers, BUT may present as multiple lesions, painful, with secondary infection. Lesions may be oral, genital, anal, or digital, and may not always be visible to the patient. Look carefully.
- **Secondary syphilis** is usually identified 3-6 weeks post chancre. Rash may present on palms and soles or elsewhere on the body. Generalized lymphadenopathy, fevers, body aches, and sore throat may also be identified.
- **Latent syphilis** can be identified by careful history and through screening serology. Please refer any patients you suspect may have latent disease to the Health Department or an infectious disease specialist.

**Screen Aggressively:** Diagnosis is essential for appropriate and timely treatment.

- **No prior diagnosis of syphilis?**
  - Draw **RPR** or **VDRL** serology
  - Follow-up all positives with a Treponemal specific antibody test
- **Prior syphilis diagnosis?**
  - Re-draw the serology (**RPR** or **VDRL**) that was the basis for the original diagnosis

**Treat Presumptively and Report promptly:**

- Patients with lesions or rashes suggestive of syphilis
- Patients with no symptoms who report recent sexual contact with infected partners
- Use benzathine penicillin G 2.4 million units IM once
- For PCN allergic individuals, follow CDC recommendations
- Refer patient to the Health Department for partner services
- Fax a communicable disease report to (520) 770-4242. Downloadable form available at [www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/investigations/forms.htm](http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/investigations/forms.htm)

**Stay Informed**

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

Respectfully,

Francisco García, MD, MPH  
Director & Chief Medical Officer