

Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH)
Alabama Emergency Response Technology (ALERT)
Health Alert Network (HAN)
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A Devastating Surge in Congenital Syphilis in Alabama

Key Message

The growing number of congenital syphilis cases in the state is a concern for the Alabama Department of Public Health. Congenital syphilis cases have grown from two in 2013 to 20 in 2020. Alabama reported 14 cases in 2019 and in 20 cases in 2020 for a rate of 35.5 cases per 100,000 live births. Between 2019 and 2020, congenital syphilis cases in Alabama increased by 143 percent. Congenital syphilis is an easily preventable disease through early detection and treatment of syphilis in pregnant women at least 30 days before delivery.

Screening for Syphilis in Pregnant Women

Because of the increasing number of cases, ADPH encourages all healthcare providers to:

- Consider all pregnant women at risk for syphilis infection.
- Assess all pregnant women for signs, symptoms, or history of syphilis.
- Test all pregnant women for syphilis during the initial prenatal visit, at 28 to 32 weeks gestation, and during delivery.
- Consider syphilis in the differential diagnosis.

Key Facts

- Women who are pregnant can become infected with the same STDs, including syphilis, as women who are not pregnant.
- Untreated syphilis in pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, low birth weight, or death shortly after birth.
- Babies born with congenital syphilis may have deformed bones; severe anemia; enlarged liver and spleen; jaundice; brain and nerve problems, such as blindness or deafness; meningitis; and skin rashes.
- Alabama reported 14 congenital syphilis cases in 2019 and 20 cases in 2020, a 143% increase since 2018.
- For more information about syphilis and congenital syphilis cases, please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/std/>.

Treatment of Syphilis During Pregnancy

- Treat all pregnant women with a positive syphilis test or signs and systems of syphilis at least 30 days before delivery to prevent congenital syphilis.
- Primary Syphilis, Secondary Syphilis, or Early Non-Primary and Non-Secondary Syphilis: **Benzathine penicillin 2.4 million units IM** every week for two weeks at 5-7 days interval.
- Syphilis Unknown Duration or Late Syphilis: **Benzathine penicillin 2.4 million units IM** every week for three weeks at 5-7 days interval.
- Refer patient partner for treatment to prevent reinfection of the pregnant woman.
- Contact Dr. Agnes Oberkor, DrPH, at 334-206-3913 for help with determining syphilis history and the stage of syphilis infection.

Reporting

- Report syphilis and congenital syphilis cases immediately online at <https://epiweb.adph.state.al.us/redcap/surveys/?s=H37ENP8ADD> or call ADPH STD Division at 334-206-5359

ADPH Support

- ADPH offers free syphilis testing and treatment for pregnant women and their partners.

Points of Contact:

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