

This is an official Oklahoma Health Alert Network Health Update

August 16, 2017

OKHAN-257-2017-03-24-UPD-N

Outbreak of Syphilis in Oklahoma County: Update and Announcement of Continuing Education Opportunity on August 23, 2017

Summary

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and the Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD) are reminding healthcare providers in the Oklahoma City metro area of an ongoing outbreak of syphilis. There have now been 190 outbreak-associated cases identified and more than 800 contact investigations have been initiated. Risk factors associated with the current outbreak include drug use, exchange of sex for drugs or money, and multiple sexual partners. Public health officials are advising increased awareness and testing of persons at risk for sexually-transmitted infections, or those who present with signs and symptoms consistent with the various stages of syphilis. All pregnant women should be tested for syphilis at their first prenatal visit and again during their third trimester. Any identified cases should be rapidly reported to the OSDH HIV/STD Service at (405) 271-4636 for case management and contact investigation.

A continuing education webinar entitled “A Call to Action: Syphilis in Oklahoma” will be offered August 23, 2017, 11:00 – noon to provide more information about syphilis trends, emerging clinical issues and congenital syphilis. The webinar is a joint training outreach with the Denver Prevention Training Institute; both CNE and CME credits are provided. Registration can be accessed at http://courses.nnptc.org/class_information.html?id=1907. (See attached flier for more information.)

Background

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and the Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD) are reminding healthcare providers in the Oklahoma City metro area of an ongoing outbreak of syphilis. Syphilis has been increasing nationwide and since 2012, there has been a 133% increase in syphilis among Oklahoma county residents. During 2016, there were 291 cases of syphilis reported in Oklahoma County which accounted for 45% of the cases identified in the entire state. So far in 2017, there have been approximately 190 cases reported and three probable stillbirths due to congenital syphilis.

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. Symptoms of syphilis are easy to miss, and easy to mistake for something else. Syphilis has different stages of infection called primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary, and there are different signs and symptoms associated with each stage. A person with primary syphilis generally has one or more sores (chancres) at the original infection site. Chancres can be firm, round and painless. Secondary syphilis symptoms may include, but are not limited to skin rash, alopecia, lymphadenopathy, or fever. The signs and symptoms of early syphilis can be mild and might not be noticed. During the early latent stage, there are no signs or symptoms, but the person still has syphilis. Tertiary syphilis is associated with severe medical problems impacting the skin and bones (gummas), central nervous system, brain and other organs. Fact Sheets for additional information on evaluating patients for primary and secondary syphilis are available at <https://www.ok.gov/health2/documents/PS%20Syphilis%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

Identifying Persons for Testing

People at highest risk for syphilis are those who use drugs, exchange sex for money or drugs, or have multiple sexual partners, and men who have sex with men. Testing for syphilis is indicated for any patient presenting with genital, oral, or anal ulcers. Certain persons with rashes, e.g., palmar-plantar rash or rash on other areas of the body with unknown cause should also be tested for syphilis. Among cases involved with the current syphilis outbreak, alopecia is a common symptom as well as large, raised, gray or white lesions, known as condyloma lata. Condyloma lata may

develop in warm, moist areas such as the mouth, underarm or groin region during secondary syphilis. All pregnant women should be screened for syphilis during their first and third trimester. There have been fifteen cases of syphilis diagnosed among pregnant women in Oklahoma County associated with the outbreak, three of which resulted in a stillbirth.

Diagnosis

Dark-field microscopy or direct fluorescent antibody tests of chancre tissue are the definitive methods for diagnosing primary and secondary syphilis. A presumptive diagnosis of syphilis requires use of two tests: a nontreponemal test (i.e., Venereal Disease Research Laboratory [VDRL] or Rapid Plasma Reagin [RPR]), and a treponemal test (i.e., fluorescent treponemal antibody absorbed [FTA-ABS] tests, the *T. pallidum* passive particle agglutination [TP-PA] assay, various enzyme immunoassays [EIAs], chemiluminescence immunoassays, immunoblots, or rapid treponemal assays). Use of only one type of serologic test is insufficient for diagnosis and can result in false-negative results in persons tested during primary syphilis and false-positive results in persons without syphilis. False-positive nontreponemal test results can be associated with various medical conditions and factors unrelated to syphilis, including other infections (e.g., HIV), autoimmune conditions, immunizations, pregnancy, injection-drug use, and older age.

Treatment

The treatment of persons for primary, secondary, or latent syphilis of < 1 year duration is 2.4 million units IM of Benzathine Penicillin G in a single dose. For treatment of pregnant women, persons with penicillin allergies, or those with late latent manifestations, consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) June 5, 2015/ Vol.64/ No. 3, Sexually Transmitted Diseases Treatment Guidelines, 2015, at <https://www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/default.htm>.

The Oklahoma City-County Health Department will be offering FREE and confidential STD screenings through September. For hours and locations, please click here: <https://www.occhd.org/clinics>.

Testing and treatment of syphilis is also available through other county health departments. For additional information or inquiries, please contact the OSDH HIV/STD Service at (405) 271-4636.

Continuing Education

We encourage participation in an upcoming webinar *A Call To Action: Syphilis in Oklahoma* on August 23, 2017. Registration and more information can accessed at http://courses.nnptc.org/class_information.html?id=1907. CME and CNE will be provided.

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Categories of Health Alert messages

Health Alert - highest level of notification that the Oklahoma State Department of Health will send out. This usually refers to an immediate threat to the OSDH community and requires immediate action.

Health Advisory - advises medical providers of a condition in the area. These are usually not medical emergencies. These may not require immediate action.

Health Update - provides updates on previous alerts or advisories. These are unlikely to require immediate action.

This notification has been distributed to Primary Care and Obstetrics & Gynecology Physicians, Advance Practice Nurses, Infection Preventionists, Laboratorians, and Emergency Departments located in Oklahoma county and bordering counties, and State and Local Health Officials

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You have received this message based upon the information contained within our emergency notification database. If you have a different or additional e-mail or fax address that you would like us to use please contact the OSDH Acute Disease Service at (405) 271-4060.
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A CALL TO ACTION

Syphilis in Oklahoma

August 23rd,
2017

11:00-12:00PM CT

TOPICS

Current Trends in Syphilis
Emerging Clinical Issues
Congenital Syphilis in
Oklahoma

Who Should Attend:

MD's, NP's, PA's, RN's | Primary Care Providers | Urgent Care Staff
Emergency Department Staff | OBGYN Providers

Registration and more information:

http://courses.nnptc.org/class_information.html?id=1907

Continuing Education:

CME & CNE will be provided!

Course Questions?

Contact Danielle Osowski | 303.602.3637 | Danielle.Osowski@dhha.org