

April 5, 2019

Public Health Alert: Continued syphilis and gonorrhea outbreak

Dear Colleagues,

The number of infectious syphilis and gonorrhea cases have increased dramatically in Alberta since 2014.

- Gonorrhea cases have more than doubled since 2014: over 5,000 cases in 2018 versus 1,900 cases in 2014.
- Over 1,500 infectious syphilis cases have been reported in 2018 compared to 160 cases in 2014.
- Since 2015, 25 infants have been diagnosed with congenital syphilis including 2 fetal deaths.
- The outbreak is province wide and all genders and socioeconomic groups are affected.

We would like to encourage you to discuss STI/HIV screening with all sexually active persons during routine office visits.

For *asymptomatic* males and non-pregnant females reporting sex with new, anonymous, or multiple partners, the following screening tests are recommended every 3-6 months:

- **Serology:**
 - Syphilis enzyme immuno-assay (EIA)
 - Anti-HIV antibody
 - Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) if immunity or immunization status unknown
 - Anti-HBsAg in individuals at high risk for infection and no previous documentation of immunity
- **First void urine (or vaginal/cervical swabs):**
 - Genprobe Aptima Combo-2 test, a nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT) for gonorrhea and chlamydia
- **Anal and/or Pharyngeal swabs:**
 - Gonorrhea and chlamydia NAAT for persons performing oral sex and/or having receptive anal intercourse

For **all pregnant females** in addition to the other screening tests recommended in the [Alberta Prenatal Screening Guidelines](#), the following STI/HIV screening tests are recommended:

- First trimester:
 - **Serology:**
 - Syphilis enzyme immuno-assay (EIA)
 - Anti-HIV antibody
 - **First void urine (or vaginal/cervical swabs):**
 - NAAT for gonorrhea and chlamydia
 - **Anal and/or Pharyngeal swabs:**
 - Gonorrhea and chlamydia NAAT for persons performing oral sex and/or having receptive anal intercourse
- At 35 weeks or later:
 - **Serology:**
 - Syphilis enzyme immuno-assay (EIA)
 - **Urine:**
 - NAAT for gonorrhea and chlamydia (only for women with ongoing risk)
 - **Anal and/or Pharyngeal swabs:**
 - Gonorrhea and chlamydia NAAT for persons performing oral sex and/or having receptive anal intercourse (only for women with ongoing risk)

For guidance on treatment of STIs, please consult the [Alberta Treatment Guidelines for Sexually Transmitted Infections \(2018\)](#).

Treatment and follow-up of all cases of syphilis (suspected or confirmed) should be done in consultation with STI Centralized Services, who can be reached at 780-735-1466 or toll free at 1-888-535-1466.

Sincerely,

Petra Smyczek MD, FRCPC

Provincial Medical Director, STI Services, Alberta Health Services