



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

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Division of Public Health

Public Health Advisory

November 15, 2021

TO: North Carolina Medical Providers

FROM: Victoria Mobley, MD MPH
Medical Director, HIV/STI Program

SUBJECT: **Statewide Increase in Syphilis Infections**

Syphilis infections are increasing in North Carolina.

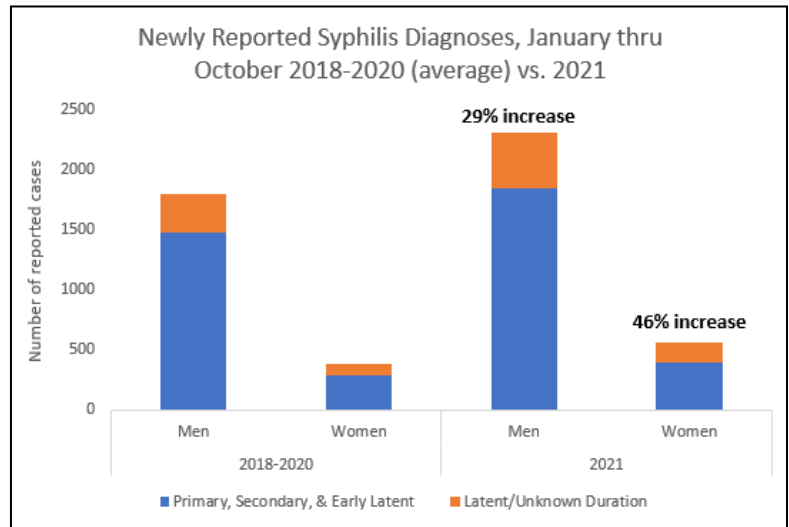
Reported syphilis infections have been on the rise in North Carolina for the last several years, and cases continued to rise in 2020, despite decreased testing and clinical visit availability during the COVID-19 pandemic. This upward trend is continuing with a 32% increase in reported syphilis infections between January and October of 2021 compared to the 2018-2020 average for the same time period, (29% in men and 46% in women).

The increase in syphilis infections among women has also been associated with an increase in [congenital syphilis \(CS\) infections](#) (18% increase in 2020 compared to 2019).

Because of the nationwide shutdown in 2020 which reduced testing and provider availability, we expect that our 2020 numbers, while increased, do not represent the entirety of the increase.

What Should Clinicians Do?

1. Take a thorough [sexual history](#) for all patients to identify STI risk factors.
2. Ensure you are familiar with the most common [signs/symptoms](#) of syphilis infections and treat immediately if the patient shows clinical signs of infection or was a contact to an early syphilis case.
3. Perform syphilis screening on any patient being tested for other STIs. (e.g., HIV, chlamydia, or gonorrhea).



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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4. Screen all pregnant women for syphilis at their first prenatal visit, between 28-30 weeks gestation, AND at delivery. This is [required](#) by North Carolina Public Health Law.
Newborns who are infected or incubating syphilis at birth may not exhibit any signs of infection until months or years after delivery which is why maternal testing at delivery is critical.
5. Follow the [CDC guidelines](#) for treatment of syphilis.
6. Advise all patients diagnosed with syphilis that they may be contacted by a public health advisor to ensure their sex partner(s) are tested and treated.
Encourage patients to notify their own sex partners either directly or anonymously using a partner notification website (e.g., <https://tellyourpartner.org/>).
7. Report all new syphilis infections to your [Local Health Department](#) within 24 hours of diagnosis using the NC Disease Report Form (part 1) which can be accessed [here](#).

Relevant websites:

- North Carolina HIV/STI Facts and Figures: <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/figures.html>
- CDC's syphilis images: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/images.htm>
- Syphilis screening requirements in pregnancy:
<http://reports.oah.state.nc.us/ncac/title%2010a%20-%20health%20and%20human%20services/chapter%2041%20-%20epidemiology%20health/subchapter%20a/10a%20ncac%2041a%20.0204.pdf>
- 2021 CDC STI Treatment Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/syphilis.htm>
- North Carolina Local Health Department contact information:
<https://www.ncalhd.org/directors/>
- North Carolina Disease Reporting Form (part 1):
https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/lhds/manuals/cd/reportable_diseases.html
- Partner notification website: <https://tellyourpartner.org/>

Contact the NC Communicable Disease Branch with questions or concerns, (919) 733-3419.