Health Advisory: Bicillin Shortage for Syphilis Treatment

Minnesota Department of Health, Tues, August 10:00 CDT 2023

Action Steps

*Local and tribal health department*: Please forward to hospitals, clinics, urgent care centers, emergency departments, and convenience clinics in your jurisdiction.

*Hospitals, clinics and other facilities*: Please forward to infection preventionists, primary care clinicians, infectious disease doctors, emergency department staff and all other health care providers who might see patients with syphilis.

*Health care providers*:

- Prioritize the use of Bicillin® L-A for the treatment of all infected pregnant people diagnosed with syphilis, as well as babies with possible congenital syphilis.
- Use doxycycline to treat non-pregnant adolescents and adults with syphilis.
- Inventory your current stock of Bicillin L-A. Plan accordingly to ensure you have enough doses to treat the number of patients you anticipate seeing in the near future, according to CDC treatment recommendations.
- Contact MDH at 651-201-5414 (1-877-676-5414) if your site is experiencing a shortage of Bicillin® L-A.

Background

The CDC and the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) have announced that the long-acting penicillin G benzathine injectable suspension products (Bicillin® L-A) are in short supply due to increased demand. This shortage is forecasted to last until at least the second quarter of 2024. Benzathine penicillin G (Bicillin® L-A) is the recommended first-line treatment for syphilis and the only recommended treatment for pregnant people and a single dose treatment for infants with possible syphilis. (See [CDC: Sexually Transmitted Infections Treatment Guidelines](https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/syphilis.htm) for a full discussion of congenital syphilis, including treatment for highly probable and for possible syphilis).

This medication shortage is of considerable concern as it is coinciding with a significant increase in syphilis, including syphilis among pregnant people and congenital syphilis. MDH data are available at [STD Statistics - 2022](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/stds/stats/2022/index.html). Prompt and timely treatment of syphilis in pregnancy is nearly 100% effective at preventing the devastating outcomes of congenital syphilis. Up to 40% of infants born to pregnant people with untreated syphilis may be stillborn or suffer early infant death, and those that do survive often face long-term morbidity including blindness, deafness, and bone damage if not appropriately treated.

Recommendations

Given the current Bicillin® L-A shortage, MDH recommends the following:

- Prioritize Bicillin® L-A for pregnant people with syphilis infection (or exposure) and infants with possible congenital syphilis.
- Prioritize Bicillin® L-A for patients with contraindications to doxycycline.
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- Conserve Bicillin® L-A by using alternative drugs for the treatment of other infectious diseases (e.g., streptococcal pharyngitis) where oral medications or other effective antimicrobials are available.
- Treat non-pregnant persons during Bicillin® L-A shortage as follows:
  - Doxycycline 100 mg PO BID for two weeks for primary, secondary or early latent syphilis and for four weeks for late latent or syphilis of unknown duration.
  - Follow patients carefully to be sure treatment is completed and schedule follow-up visits with patients to verify a decline in syphilis non-treponemal titer (RPR).
- Use recommended treatment intervals and follow-up with clinical and serologic evaluation per the CDC: Sexually Transmitted Infections Treatment Guidelines, 2021 ([https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/syphilis.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/syphilis.htm)).
- Inventory your current stock of Bicillin® L-A.
  - Plan accordingly to ensure you have enough doses to treat the number of patients you anticipate seeing in the near future, according to CDC treatment recommendations.

If your site is experiencing a Bicillin® L-A shortage: Contact MDH at 651-201-5414 and request to speak to someone in the STD, HIV, and TB Section. MDH may be able to facilitate the procurement of the medication.

Additional Information

For questions related to the Bicillin® L-A shortage or treatment of syphilis or congenital syphilis, please contact MDH at 651-201-5414 and request to speak to someone in the STD, HIV, and TB Section or contact the STD Clinical Consultation Network ([https://www.stdccn.org/](https://www.stdccn.org/)), or stdcb@cdph.ca.gov by email.

To arrange in-person clinical STI training, contact the STD Nurse Specialist at MDH: 651-592-3013.
Access the National STI Curriculum training webinars at National STI Curriculum ([https://www.std.uw.edu/](https://www.std.uw.edu/))
Sign up at Syphilis ([https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/syphilis/index.html](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/syphilis/index.html)) to receive notices about health issues, new publications, or STD/HIV/TB events from the MDH STD, HIV, and TB Section at MDH.

A copy of this HAN is available at: MDH Health Alert Network ([http://www.health.state.mn.us/han](http://www.health.state.mn.us/han))
The content of this message is intended for public health and health care personnel and response partners who have a need to know the information to perform their duties.