

NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT

Syphilis Screening in All Pregnant People and Adults Ages 18 to 50 to Prevent Congenital Syphilis

October 17, 2025

Background:

In the United States, cases of congenital syphilis have increased steadily since 2013. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that congenital syphilis case increased again in 2024 with 3,941 cases of congenital syphilis reported. CDC now recommends broader screening for syphilis:

[County-level Syphilis Data](#) | [STI Statistics](#) | [CDC](#)

New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) launched an [STD data dashboard](#) in summer 2025 to highlight disease trends and ensure resources are targeted effectively. Key information on the rates of syphilis and congenital syphilis includes the following:

- In 2023, NMDOH reported 91 cases of congenital syphilis (19.7% increase from 2022 and 874% increase in the last 5 years), with a decline to 74 congenital cases in 2024.
- In 2024, New Mexico syphilis rates dropped for the first time since 2018. Primary and secondary syphilis rates — the most infectious stages of the disease — dropped 31% from 36.5 per 100,000 in 2023 to 25.3 per 100,000 in 2024 but remain twice the national rate of 12.2 per 100,000¹

Given the continued high rates of syphilis in NM, NMDOH is reissuing a Public Health Order (PHO) to renew the following syphilis screening recommendations: screen pregnant people during the first and third trimesters, and at the time of delivery and *screen all non-pregnant individuals ages 18 – 50 yearly*. In October 2023, NMDOH added the recommendation for yearly screening for people ages 18 – 50. A more detailed discussion of this discussion is available here: [Syphilis 2024 nmhealth.org](#)

Direction for Clinicians:

1. **Screen people ages 18 – 50** for syphilis at least once in the next 12 months or more often as recommended based on individual risk or pregnancy status.
2. **Testing for pregnant people:**
 - a. Test for syphilis in both the 1st trimester (or initial prenatal visit) and 3rd trimester (at 28-32 weeks gestational age) of pregnancy.
 - b. Test for syphilis at delivery.
 - c. Syphilis testing for all pregnant people who present to urgent care or an emergency room if the patient has not received prior prenatal care.
 - d. Syphilis testing of any woman with an intrauterine fetal demise at any gestational age.
 - e. Syphilis testing for all pregnant people at correctional facilities, including prisons, jails, and juvenile detention centers, at the intervals listed above.

¹ [Sexually Transmitted Infections Surveillance, 2024 \(Provisional\)](#) | [STI Statistics](#) | [CDC](#)

3. Consider syphilis in all pregnant people

Syphilis during pregnancy is associated with miscarriage, stillbirth, perinatal death, preterm delivery, and congenital infection. Timely diagnosis and treatment of syphilis among pregnant people can prevent congenital syphilis.

Most people who gave birth to babies with congenital syphilis received limited or no prenatal care. Therefore, *every health encounter* with a pregnant person can be considered an opportunity to test for syphilis. Maternal risk factors for syphilis during pregnancy include:

- sex with multiple partners,
- sex in conjunction with drug use or transactional sex,
- late entry to prenatal care or no prenatal care,
- methamphetamine or heroin use,
- incarceration of the woman or her partner,
- unstable housing or homelessness

4. Treatment:

Benzathine penicillin G (Bicillin L-A®) **is the only approved antimicrobial for treating syphilis in pregnancy** and preventing congenital syphilis. Pregnant people with penicillin allergies should be desensitized and treated with penicillin according to the dosage schedules appropriate for the stage of syphilis.

5. Evaluation of Newborns:

Diagnosis of congenital syphilis in newborns can be difficult and should be made on the basis of identification of syphilis in the mother; adequacy of maternal treatment; presence of clinical, laboratory, or radiographic evidence of syphilis in the neonate; and comparison of maternal (at delivery) and neonatal nontreponemal serologic titers (e.g., RPR or VDRL) by using the same test, preferably conducted by the same laboratory.

All infants born to mothers who have reactive nontreponemal and treponemal test results should be evaluated with a serum RPR or VDRL and should be examined thoroughly for evidence of congenital syphilis (e.g., nonimmune hydrops, conjugated or direct hyperbilirubinemia or cholestatic jaundice or cholestasis, hepatosplenomegaly, rhinitis, skin rash, or pseudoparalysis of an extremity). Conducting a treponemal test on neonatal serum is not recommended because it is difficult to interpret, as passively transferred maternal antibodies can persist for >15 months. For more details see: [Congenital Syphilis - STI Treatment Guidelines](#).

6. Prevention:

Congenital syphilis can be prevented with timely screening and prompt treatment of pregnant people. During pregnancy care, providers should assess the risk for reinfection and prevent reinfection by treating all sex partners.

Providers should also be aware of the [indications for doxy-PEP](#) as an STI prevention strategy. Taking a 200mg dose of doxycycline within 72 hours of condomless sex has been shown to decrease acquisition of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis by 60% in men who have sex with men and transgender women.

7. Reporting:

New Mexico law requires that syphilis infections be reported to NMDOH within 24 hours of diagnosis. Fax completed reporting forms to the NMDOH STD Program at (505) 476-3638. Reporting allows cases to be investigated and partners to be contacted. NMDOH has more than 25 Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS) who are certified to conduct confidential syphilis case investigations.

For consultation, including results from previous testing, providers can call the NMDOH Help Line at 1-833-SWNURSE (1-833-796-8773).

- NMDOH Reporting forms: <https://nmhealth.org/publication/view/form/1594/>
- NMDOH STD program information: <https://nmhealth.org/about/phd/idb/std/>

Read the full Expanded Syphilis Screening [Public Health Order](#)

New Mexico Health Alert Network: To register for the NM Health Alert Network, please visit the following site <https://nm.readyop.com/fs/4cjZ/10b2> Please fill out the registration form completely and click Submit at the bottom of the page, to begin receiving Important health alerts, advisories, and updates.

Please Note that our system also utilizes text messaging to notify members of important health information. Due to FCC Regulation changes that are designed to decrease the amount of unwanted spam text messages sent each year to citizens, please save, this phone number (855) 596-1810 as the “New Mexico Health Alert Network” default phone number for your account used for text messages on the mobile device(s) you register with us.