

# 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 \(https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/syphilis.htm\)](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 \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/stds/stats/2022/index.html\)](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.

## HEALTH ADVISORY: BICILLIN SHORTAGE FOR SYPHILIS TREATMENT

- 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](mailto: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.