



Dear Colleague:

Georgia's congenital syphilis rate is at its highest level since record keeping began in 1998. In fact, the rate has increased every year since 2016. **Congenital syphilis is preventable.** Each case is one too many when adequate prenatal care, syphilis testing, and early treatment can save lives.

The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) amended its regulations in August 2022 to add additional testing requirements that align with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) recommendations for prenatal screening. Georgia Rules and Regulations 511-5-4 now mandates that all pregnant women be tested for syphilis and HIV during their pregnancies. Many mothers of newborns born with congenital syphilis became infected after being tested at initiation of prenatal care, highlighting the importance of third trimester (28-32 weeks) testing.

To prevent syphilis in newborns, healthcare providers should:

- **Test** all pregnant women for syphilis and HIV at their first prenatal visit
- **Retest** all pregnant women for syphilis and HIV at 28 – 32 weeks and again at delivery
- **Treat** all pregnant women with diagnosed or suspected syphilis immediately with benzathine penicillin G only. [Syphilis treatment](#) initiated at least 30 days before birth has proven to be effective at decreasing the chances that a baby is born with congenital syphilis. Treatment for HIV should be initiated immediately. HIV antiretroviral therapy during pregnancy, at the time of delivery, and prophylaxis to the newborn dramatically reduce perinatal transmission of HIV.

Georgia law requires all Georgia physicians, laboratories, and other [health care providers to report](#) patients with syphilis infections to the Georgia Department of Public Health (Georgia Code O.C.G.A. §31-12-2). Both laboratory confirmed and clinical diagnoses are reportable within the specified time intervals.

As commissioner and as a physician, I urge you to test pregnant women for syphilis during their first prenatal visit and during their third trimester as part of your routine prenatal care – not just because it is the law, but for the health and well-being of every mother and infant in Georgia. If you have any questions, please contact your district health office or call the Georgia Department of Public Health at 1-866-PUB-HLTH (1-866-782-4584).

Thank you for all that you do to help protect the lives of all Georgians.

Sincerely,

Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner and State Health Officer