

September 5, 2024

Dear Minnesota Health Care Provider,

We are writing to share new recommendations for screening for syphilis in Minnesota. Please see the attachment for the screening guidance. There currently is an unprecedented increase of syphilis in Minnesota and in the United States. To summarize, between 2014-2023, syphilis cases in our state increased by 178%; among females, syphilis cases increased by 554%. There were 29 congenital syphilis cases last year, the highest we've seen in at least 40 years. Additionally, these increases have had a disproportionate impact on historically disadvantaged populations.¹

In response to this unprecedented increase in syphilis and congenital syphilis in Minnesota, MDH recommends that ALL individuals aged 18-49 years should be screened (tested) for syphilis, using an opt-out approach, at least once as part of routine health care. Additional testing should also be considered for patients under age 18 or over age 49 based on sexual activity and other risk factors.

Other national and state public health entities including the Indian Health Services (IHS), Colorado, New Mexico, and Seattle/ King County Departments of Health, have developed updated screening recommendations.

Historically, syphilis testing has been performed based either on presence of symptoms or based on risk factors. Health care providers should maintain awareness of risk factors for syphilis, and persons at higher risk should be tested more frequently. Risk factors include persons with multiple partners or new sexual partners since last screening, those with other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or partners with known STI, men who have sex with men, people living with HIV, transgender and gender diverse individuals, those with a history of incarceration, those with history of transactional sex, or those with housing instability. Syphilis screening should also be performed if requested by the patient.

¹ [MDH STI Statistics 2023](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/stds/stats/2023/index.html#:~:text=Summary,adults%20ages%2015%20to%2024)

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For more information, please visit MDH's [Syphilis Information for Health Professionals webpage](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/syphilis/hcp/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/syphilis/hcp/index.html>).

Thank you for all you do to protect the health of Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

Ruth Lynfield, MD
State Epidemiologist and Medical Director
Minnesota Department of Health