



Rick Scott
Governor

H. Frank Farmer, Jr., MD, PhD, FACP
State Surgeon General

Re: Syphilis Outbreak

Dear Physician:

This letter is to notify you and to request your assistance concerning the current outbreak of syphilis in Escambia County, Florida. Historically, 16-37 cases of syphilis are reported annually in this county. However, last year we had 69 cases and already this year, 69 cases have been reported. We request your assistance in halting the current outbreak by vigorously identifying and treating cases in your own practice since we do not have the capacity to evaluate and treat all suspects at the Escambia County Health Department (ECHD).

In addition to increasing in number, the case demographics have shifted, so that instead of the usual risk groups for syphilis (men who have sex with men, individuals 35-40 years old) the affected population is comprised of 20-34 years old heterosexual individuals of both genders. One third of the cases reside in the 32505 zip code. Both whites and blacks are affected, although the majority of male cases are black. Because the risk group is now younger and nearly 50% of cases are women, there is an elevated risk of infection during pregnancy. In 2011, there have already been four cases of syphilis during pregnancy, one contributing to a fetal death.

During this outbreak, we request that you increase your level of suspicion as you evaluate your patients. Three fourths of cases reported this year are secondary or early latent syphilis, indicating that the primary chancre was not brought to the attention of a healthcare professional. Therefore, a high index of suspicion when evaluating rash illnesses is indicated. In addition to testing those with current or past suspicious rash and/or chancre lesions, or who report risk behaviors or exposure to syphilis, we recommend that you perform more frequent syphilis screening in:

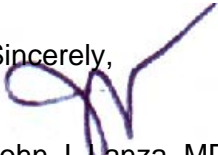
- Pregnant women;
- Men and women aged 20-34 who have had unprotected intercourse, especially if their residence is located in the 32505 zip code;
- Men and women reporting multiple or unknown sex partners, or sex for money or drugs; and,
- Any individual who wants to be tested, given that there is an outbreak occurring.

Because our ability to provide clinical services is very limited, the ECHD appreciates the evaluation and treatment services you provide in your office. Primary, secondary, and early latent syphilis in adults is treated with Benzathine Penicillin G 2.4 million units IM in a single dose. Late latent syphilis or syphilis of unknown duration in adults should be treated with Benzathine Penicillin G 7.2 million units total, administered as three doses of 2.4 million units IM each at one week intervals. For more information on neurosyphilis and other nuances of the disease and treatment, please note that the treatment recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can be accessed online at <http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2010/STD-Treatment-2010-RR5912.pdf>.

Please report all cases of syphilis you identify and treat to the ECHD at 850.595.6740 or fax the information to 850.595.6761, with all associated patient information including method of treatment. This will allow our disease intervention staff to interview the case, to identify contacts, and to refer them for evaluation/treatment.

Thank you for your assistance in halting the syphilis outbreak in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be 'J. Lanza', with a long, sweeping line extending upwards and to the right.

John J. Lanza, MD, PhD, MPH, FAAP, Director
Florida Department of Health
Escambia County Health Department