A Devastating Surge in Congenital Syphilis in Alabama

Key Message
After decreasing from 10.5 to 8.4 reported congenital syphilis cases per 100,000 live births during 2008–2012, the national rate of reported congenital syphilis has subsequently increased each year since 2012. In 2018, there were a total of 1,306 reported cases of congenital syphilis, including 78 syphilitic stillbirths and 16 infant deaths, and a national rate of 33.1 cases per 100,000 live births. The state of congenital syphilis cases in Alabama mirrors the national trend. In 2017, a total of five congenital syphilis cases were reported to the Alabama Department of Public Health. As of December 31, 2019, a total of 15 cases were reported of congenital syphilis, including one syphilitic stillbirth and two infant deaths.

Due to the increase in cases, ADPH encourages all healthcare providers to:
• Consider all pregnant women at risk for syphilis infection.
• Assess all pregnant women for signs, symptoms, or history of syphilis.
• Routinely test all pregnant women for syphilis during the initial prenatal visit, at 28 to 32 weeks gestation, and during labor just prior to delivery.
• Consider syphilis in the differential diagnosis.

Key Facts
• Untreated syphilis in pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, low birth weight, or death shortly after birth.
• Babies born with congenital syphilis may have deformed bones; severe anemia; enlarged liver and spleen; jaundice; brain and nerve problems, such as blindness or deafness; meningitis; and skin rashes.
• 2019 to date, Alabama reported 15 cases of congenital syphilis, including one syphilitic stillbirth, and two infant deaths.
• For more information about syphilis and congenital syphilis cases, please visit https://www.cdc.gov/std/.

Treatment of Syphilis During Pregnancy
• Providers should treat all pregnant women with a positive syphilis test and signs and systems of syphilis.
• Provider must treat infected pregnant women immediately or at least 30 days before delivery with benzathine penicillin 2.4 million units.
• Refer patient partner for treatment
Reporting
- Report syphilis and congenital syphilis cases immediately online at https://epiweb.adph.state.al.us/redcap/surveys/?s=H37ENP8ADD or call ADPH STD Division at 334-206-5359

ADPH Support
- ADPH offers free syphilis testing and treatment for pregnant women and their partners.

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