



Date: May 25, 2016
To: Durham County Medical Providers
From: Arlene Sena, M.D., M.P.H., Medical Director
Re: Syphilis and Bicillin L-A® shortage

Syphilis

The incidence of syphilis continues to be high in Durham County and in North Carolina, primarily among men who have sex with men (MSM). This increase from prior years is particularly alarming because 46% of men with syphilis also have HIV infection. To address this increase among MSM, we encourage healthcare providers to conduct 1) syphilis screening among all MSM and HIV-infected patients at least annually; 2) syphilis screening among all pregnant women; and 3) syphilis testing among persons with signs or symptoms suggestive of syphilis. For patient educational resources and posters regarding syphilis and HIV, please go to the American Sexual Health Association website at <http://www.ashpublications.org/index.php/posters/>

Bicillin shortage

Benzathine penicillin (PCN) is the primary treatment for syphilis and the only recommended treatment for pregnant women infected or exposed to syphilis. Pfizer, the sole manufacturer of Bicillin L-A® (benzathine PCN G) in the United States, is experiencing a manufacturing delay of this product which is not expected to be resolved until July 2016.

Until normal quantities of benzathine PCN are available, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends implementing the usage strategy below if your pharmacy inventory of Bicillin is less than 2 months based on projected use, or you are experiencing difficulties getting access to the medication:

- a. Prioritize Bicillin use for all pregnant females and patients with clinical manifestations of primary, secondary, or early latent syphilis as outlined in the 2015 CDC STD Treatment Guidelines. Please note that additional doses to treat early syphilis (i.e. Bicillin 2.4 mu qweek for 3 doses instead of one) do not enhance efficacy among HIV co-infected patients.
- b. Limit the use of benzathine penicillin G for treatment of other infectious diseases (e.g. streptococcal pharyngitis) where other effective antimicrobials are available.

If you have any questions regarding the clinical management of syphilis or the Bicillin shortage, or need to refer a syphilis patient to the Health Department for care, please contact Karen Hicks, FNP at khicks@dconc.gov or 919-560-7820. I can be reached at 919-560-7640 or cell phone 919-824-2173 for urgent questions.

