



Syphilis Screening Protocols, Information and Recommendations for Providers

Date: June 30, 2021

Public Health Message Type: Advisory, Update

Counties Effected: All

Intended Audience: Healthcare providers, All public health partners, local health departments

Contact: Amelia Hamarman, STD Program amelia.hamarman@doh.nj.gov

Message: Five-year New Jersey syphilis case trends show an overall increase of 81%, including an 105% increase in primary and secondary syphilis. In response to these alarming increases, it is imperative that new syphilis cases, both symptomatic and asymptomatic, be identified as soon as possible to prevent the continued spread of infection as well as negative health outcomes, including congenital syphilis and neurosyphilis.

Syphilis diagnosis and case definition requires BOTH a nontreponemal test (most commonly a rapid plasma reagin (RPR) test) and a specific treponemal test (such as an FTA-ABS, TPPA and EIA). Both types of test are required even when syphilis-specific clinical findings are present.

The traditional algorithm for syphilis screening is an RPR screen followed with a reflex to titer and a reflex to confirmatory (treponemal test). Most commercial labs, such as Labcorp and Quest, allow providers to either order RPRs only or as a panel that includes reflex to titer and/or confirmatory. Unless a provider has a documented syphilis history for a patient that includes a positive treponemal lab result, syphilis labs should be ordered “reflex to confirmatory.” Ordering an RPR-only lab can result in delays in diagnosis and treatment which can lead to serious health outcomes as well as the continued spread of infection.

The NJDOH is asking all NJ providers who test for syphilis to join us in our efforts to decrease the burden of this disease on NJ residents by ensuring complete syphilis testing with one blood draw. To this end, providers and practices are encouraged to work with their IT team to ensure that EHR syphilis lab orders are coded properly to include “reflex to confirmatory”.

For questions about syphilis testing and diagnosis, please call the NJ DOH STD Program at 609-826-4869.

Resources and Information:

Syphilis testing and treatment <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/default.htm>

Syphilis Pocket Guide for Providers <https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/Syphilis-Pocket-Guide-FINAL-508.pdf>

NJ STD Reporting Requirements <http://www.nj.gov/health/hivstdtb/stds/>

Syphilis Diagnosis, Management and Prevention

https://www.nycptc.org/x/Syphilis_Monograph_2019_NYC_PTC_NYC_DOHMH.pdf