



Orange County

ATTENTION

STEVEN M. NEUHAUS
County Executive

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

Dr. Irina Gelman, DPM, MPH, PhDc
Commissioner of Health

May 6th, 2022

PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO OB/GYN, URGENT CARE, EMERGENCY ROOM, INFECTIOUS DISEASE, DENTISTS, MAXILLOFACIAL SURGEONS, ENT'S, MEDICAL DIRECTORS, PEDIATRIC, PRIMARY CARE, INTERNAL MEDICINE, FAMILY PRACTICE, LABORATORIES AND AMBULATORY CARE STAFF.

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT #4

ATYPICAL PRESENTATION OF SYPHILIS COUPLED WITH CONTINUED INCREASE IN REPORTED CASES IN ORANGE COUNTY, NY

BACKGROUND

In Orange County, there has been an 97.8% increase in syphilis cases between 2017 and 2021, with nearly 25% of the cases in females. In 2021, Orange County was [listed as one of the top five counties in New York State](#), outside of New York City, with increasing diagnoses of early syphilis and congenital syphilis. Orange County's cumulative early syphilis diagnosis rate between 2018-2021 was 1.7 times the rate of New York State outside of NYC (98.7 vs. 57.4 per 100,000). Year to date, OCDOH has investigated 4 cases of syphilis during pregnancy. These cases were all diagnosed within a 7-week timeframe and exceeds the total amount of syphilis in pregnancy investigated in 2021.

Recently, a subset of early syphilis cases, presenting with painful lesions has been identified in Orange County. This subset includes extra-genital presentations with oral lesions. Physicians must remain suspicious of syphilis and include it on their list of differential diagnosis to be ruled out. Syphilis lesions are typically characterized as being relatively painless, in contrast to the often-painful lesions of herpesvirus or chancroid. Given the increase in newly diagnosed syphilis cases across the nation, along with the manifestation of primary syphilis noted above, Orange County Department of Health (OCDOH) is concerned about the potential for misdiagnosis associated with painful chancrous or herpetiform lesion(s) presentation of primary syphilis and therefore recommends clinicians adopt concurrent HSV and syphilis testing protocols.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Concurrent HSV and syphilis testing protocols adopted by all providers in Orange County
 - HSV testing via PCR swab of ulcer swab
- Report all confirmed cases of syphilis at the time of diagnosis to Orange County Department of Health. Pregnant people are given highest priority and should be reported immediately.
- Screen pregnant women at the first prenatal visit and at the third trimester (28 weeks preferred).

For questions, please contact Kaitlin Cafferky, Supervising Public Health Investigator, (845)-360-6541.