



March 7, 2023

Medical Alert – Syphilis Update

The infectious syphilis outbreak in the Northwestern Health Unit catchment area is ongoing, and rates continue to increase. In 2022 syphilis rates increased by 21%, which is an incidence of 171.3 per 100,000. Prior to 2018 when rates started to spike, the area's syphilis incidence was 2.9 per 100,000. Most cases are in the Sioux Lookout and Kenora Health Hubs.

The most common risk factors are:

- no condom use
- sex with the opposite sex
- injection drug use/substance use
- multiple/new sex partners and
- being underhoused/homeless

Other risk factors include:

Unprotected sex with multiple partners, substance use, incarceration, homeless or unstable housing, those requesting STI testing, those with a confirmed or suspected STI, men who have sex with men, or having a sexual partner with any of the above risk factors.

Please consider:

- Testing for syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for those who are at risk.
- Testing during pregnancy:
 - Universal screening of all pregnant women during the first trimester.
 - **Screening test should be repeated at 28-32 weeks and again at delivery for ALL pregnant women.**
 - More frequent re-screening may be considered based on risk factors.
- Testing for syphilis in patients with compatible symptoms including a primary chancre, maculopapular rash involving the palms and soles or other signs of syphilis.
- Providing risk reduction counselling to patients on the importance of condoms and dental dams; both are available at no charge from NWHU for distribution through your clinic.
- Treatment for STIs can be made available at no charge; please contact NWHU to arrange for free medication through your clinic.
- Completing NWHU forms for cases – this supports epidemiological and surveillance efforts.



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca

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Resources for Health Care Providers

Information and supports for health care providers and the most recent epidemiological report are available at the [NWHU - Syphilis webpage](#).

Public Health Agency of Canada has recently updated the Sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections: Guides for health professionals, which is available [here](#).

Please reach out if you have any questions.

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