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**Tuscarawas County
Health Department**

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Syphilis Cases Increasing in Region 5 Counties


DOVER—Cases of syphilis are increasing across Ohio. In fact, the Ohio Department of Health posted a health alert in July of 2021 asking health care providers to increase syphilis screening. Additionally, the Tuscarawas County Health Department (TCHD) was recently notified of case increases in our eight-county region. In Region 5 (Carroll, Coshocton, Harrison, Holmes, Jefferson, Stark, Tuscarawas, and Wayne Counties), there was a 45% increase in infectious syphilis cases and a 200% increase in congenital syphilis cases during 2021. Syphilis is caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. Infectious syphilis is spread person-to-person as a sexually transmitted disease (STD), and congenital syphilis is spread from a pregnant woman to her baby during the pregnancy or at birth.



Those infected with syphilis may not have symptoms for years but remain at risk for late complications that can affect multiple organs if not treated. Complications can include meningitis, dementia, decreased vision, blindness, hearing loss, ringing in the ears, and other organ damage. The rise in congenital syphilis is of great concern and increases the risk for low birth weight, prematurity, bone deformities, severe anemia, enlarged liver and spleen, jaundice, brain and nerve damage, meningitis, miscarriage, stillbirth, and death shortly after birth. Once detected, syphilis can be treated and cured with antibiotics.



To promote early detection and treatment, syphilis screening is recommended for all pregnant women early in the pregnancy, preferably during the first prenatal visit. Additionally, the Ohio Department of Health and American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists recommend healthcare providers implement third trimester screening for syphilis as a new standard of practice, especially in areas with high prevalence. This additional testing should occur at 28-32 weeks of gestation and again at delivery. Prompt identification of syphilis cases among pregnant women can allow healthcare providers adequate time to initiate treatment prior to delivery, decreasing the risk of congenital syphilis to the unborn baby.

Those who are concerned about syphilis risks are encouraged to talk with their medical provider or call the Tuscarawas County Health Department at 330-343-5555, ext. 132. More information about syphilis can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-congenital-syphilis.htm> .

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