



Date: March 10, 2017
To: CAHAN San Diego Participants
From: Public Health Services, HIV, STD and Hepatitis Services Branch

Limited Availability of Long-Acting Bicillin® Continues

This health advisory updates CAHAN participants that there is a continued nationwide shortage of the long-acting form of benzathine penicillin G (i.e., Bicillin® L-A). Several local healthcare facilities have reported critically low or completely depleted supplies of the medication and backorder delivery delays. Providers should prioritize the use of Bicillin® L-A for pregnant women who are infected with or exposed to syphilis and their sexual partners.

Background

On April 29, 2016, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced a nationwide shortage of Bicillin® L-A due to a manufacturing delay. Until recently, this shortage has had minimal impact on supply in the San Diego region. However, at least four local healthcare facilities have recently reported either running out of the medication or having critically low medication supplies. Orders for additional medication have been delayed or are not being filled. Although supply improvements are anticipated by the end of March 2017, full recovery is not expected until the fourth quarter of 2017. Updated information about this and other medication shortages may be found at the [FDA Drug Shortage webpage](#).

Bicillin® L-A is recommended for treatment of most stages of syphilis and **all** pregnant women with syphilis. Penicillin G is the recommended treatment for all stages of syphilis and is the only antibiotic known to prevent maternal transmission of *Treponema pallidum* to a fetus (i.e., congenital syphilis). Bicillin® L-A is recommended for treatment of all stages of adult syphilis, excluding neurosyphilis and ocular syphilis. For non-pregnant adults who cannot receive penicillin, alternative medications, such as doxycycline, may be used. Other formulations of penicillin G, such as Bicillin® C-R, are not acceptable alternatives to Bicillin® L-A for syphilis treatment.

Pregnant women infected with or exposed to syphilis must receive Bicillin® L-A without exception. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC 2015 STD Treatment Guidelines](#)) provide detailed recommendations for stage-specific treatment of syphilis, including management of pregnant women with syphilis.

Requested Actions

Until supplies of Bicillin® L-A normalize, it should be reserved for the treatment of syphilis in pregnant women infected with or exposed to syphilis and sexual partners of pregnant women. If supplies permit, other priority groups include patients with absolute contraindications to recommended alternative treatment regimens for syphilis, and patients who are unlikely to comply with alternative treatment, due to factors such as substance abuse and mental health conditions. For other adults who have been infected with or exposed to syphilis, alternative treatment regimens, such as doxycycline, are recommended. Providers also are encouraged to avoid giving extra doses of Bicillin® L-A, in addition to what is recommended by CDC for non-pregnant adults, as there is no evidence to support this practice, regardless of the HIV status of the patient.

For indications other than syphilis, providers are encouraged to use alternative treatment regimens when possible based on national guidelines from the [Infectious Diseases Society of America \(IDSA\)](#) and the [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#).

Examples of this include:

- Using recommended oral medications, such as penicillin V, amoxicillin, and azithromycin, for treatment of pharyngitis due to Group A β -hemolytic streptococci and for primary rheumatic fever prophylaxis.
- Using oral penicillin V for secondary rheumatic fever prophylaxis, if compliance is not an issue.

County STD Clinic Referrals for Bicillin® L-A Treatment

Providers who are unable to obtain Bicillin® L-A, due to the current shortage, may refer patients to the County of San Diego STD Clinics for treatment by calling **(619) 692-8501**. Referrals will be approved for the following patients:

- Pregnant women who have syphilis, or have been exposed to syphilis;
- Sexual partners/contacts of pregnant women;
- Patients who were initiated on a multi-dose Bicillin® L-A treatment regimen, prior to the publication of this report; and
- Patients for whom there is an absolute contraindication to alternative treatment regimens, such as doxycycline, or who are highly unlikely to comply with an oral treatment regimen.

The referring facility must provide written documentation of physical examination, including assessment for signs of primary and secondary syphilis and a neurological examination, laboratory test results, stage of infection, and why the patient cannot receive an alternative treatment regimen.

Thank you for adhering to these recommended guidelines and for your continued participation.

CAHAN San Diego

County of San Diego, Health & Human Services Agency

HIV, STD & Hepatitis Branch

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