



To: CAHAN San Diego Participants

Date: April 25, 2023

From: Public Health Services

Health Advisory: Potential Access Challenges to Bicillin L-A®

Key Messages

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported potential access challenges to long-acting penicillin G benzathine (Bicillin L-A® or “BIC”) for treatment of syphilis.
- Long-acting penicillin G benzathine is the recommended first-line treatment for most forms of adult syphilis, excluding neurosyphilis, and is the only recommended treatment for syphilis during pregnancy.
- Until supplies normalize, providers should prioritize the use of Bicillin L-A® to treat pregnant people who are infected with or exposed to syphilis, their sexual partners, and babies with congenital syphilis.
- Bicillin C-R® is not interchangeable with Bicillin L-A® and should never be used to treat syphilis.
- Contact the local health department if your facility has a shortage or low inventory of Bicillin L-A® by calling (619) 692-8501.

Situation

On April 16, 2023, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) announced a long-acting penicillin G benzathine (Bicillin L-A®) shortage. Also, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported that some STD programs are currently unable to procure enough Bicillin L-A® to treat syphilis in their jurisdictions.

Background

Pfizer, the sole producer of Bicillin L-A®, cited increased demand as the reason for the shortage and anticipates that the issue will be resolved in the next two months. Meanwhile, they are working with CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to address urgent requests.

Bicillin L-A® is the recommended first-line agent for most stages of syphilis, excluding neurosyphilis, ocular syphilis, and otosyphilis. Further, it is the only recommended treatment for *pregnant* people infected with or exposed to syphilis. Doxycycline 100 mg orally BID for two weeks (for primary, secondary, and early latent syphilis) or four weeks (for late latent syphilis and syphilis of unknown duration) is an alternative to Bicillin L-A® for treatment of *non-pregnant* people with allergy or other contraindication to penicillin. While Bicillin C-R® is a similar pharmaceutical to Bicillin L-A®, it is not interchangeable with Bicillin L-A®, as it contains two different types of penicillin, and is not recommended for syphilis treatment.

Thirty cases of congenital syphilis, including one stillbirth, were reported in San Diego County in 2021, with a rate of 76.8 cases per 100,000 live births (a 48.8% increase from 2019 and a 1,013.0% increase from 2013). Ten syphilitic stillbirths were reported in the region from 2013-2021. Congenital syphilis is preventable through timely diagnosis and treatment of syphilis during pregnancy.

Actions Requested

1. **Monitor** inventory of Bicillin L-A® at your institution.
2. **Prioritize** the use of Bicillin L-A® to treat: 1) pregnant people infected with or exposed to syphilis and their partners; 2) babies with congenital syphilis; and 3) persons with allergy or other contraindication to doxycycline (or who are unable to adhere to doxycycline). If supply is adequate to expand use of the medication, other groups to be prioritized include the following (in descending order):
 - Cases of primary and secondary syphilis (including those with positive darkfield microscopy)
 - Cases who meet CDC criteria for early latent syphilis
 - Cases of late latent syphilis or syphilis of unknown duration with high non-treponemal titer (i.e., 1:8 or higher)
 - Cases of late latent syphilis or syphilis of unknown duration with low non-treponemal titer (i.e., 1:4 or lower)
3. **Test** for syphilis in persons who present with compatible signs and symptoms and **screen** for syphilis in the absence of signs and symptoms based on CDC recommendations. Screen pregnant persons for syphilis at least twice during pregnancy, including at the first prenatal visit and at 28-32 weeks gestation. Screen at delivery unless the patient had a negative third trimester screen and is not at increased risk of syphilis acquisition.
4. **Notify** the HIV, STD, and Hepatitis Branch (HSHB) of Public Health Services of any shortages or low inventories of Bicillin L-A®. You may also contact HSHB for assistance obtaining Bicillin L-A® for situations with no alternative treatment options.
5. **Avoid** using Bicillin L-A® for conditions other than syphilis (e.g., Group A β -hemolytic streptococcal pharyngitis, primary and secondary rheumatic fever prophylaxis) unless a patient cannot take oral medications. Do not give extra doses of Bicillin L-A® in addition to what is recommended by CDC.
6. **Report** all cases of syphilis within 24 hours of diagnosis to HSHB by faxing a Confidential Morbidity Report to (619) 692-8541 or via encrypted e-mail to PHS-HSHB-STDReporting-Fax.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov.

Resources

[CDC Drug Notices Webpage](#)

[ASHP Penicillin G Benzathine Webpage](#)

[2021 CDC Sexually Transmitted Infection Treatment Guidelines](#)

[Expanded Syphilis Screening Recommendations for the Prevention of Congenital Syphilis \(Guidelines for California Medical Providers, 2020\)](#)

Thank you for your participation.

CAHAN San Diego

County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency

HIV, STD, and Hepatitis Branch

Phone (for providers, M-F 8AM-5PM): (619) 692-8501 (lab/treatment histories and staging/treatment recommendations), (619) 609-3245 (clinical consultations for challenging cases); Fax: (619) 692-8541

E-mail: cahan@sdcounty.ca.gov

Secure Website: <http://cahan.ca.gov>

Public Website: <http://www.cahansandiego.com>