

**NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT
DRUG SHORTAGE OF BICILLIN L-A® FOR THE TREATMENT OF SYPHILIS**

May 5, 2023

Background

Both the CDC and FDA are reporting national shortages of Benzathine penicillin G (Bicillin L-A®) due to increased demand: [FDA Drug Shortages](#) and [CDC - STD Treatment - Drug notices](#). The FDA anticipates the issue will be resolved by the fourth quarter of this year. There are no emergency stockpiles of this medication and existing supplies are very limited.

This drug shortage is of public health importance because Bicillin L-A® is the only recommended treatment for pregnant people infected with or exposed to syphilis. Nationwide, congenital syphilis rates have increased 203 % in the past five years. According to CDC disease surveillance data, New Mexico is currently second in the country for rates of congenital syphilis.

While Bicillin L-A® remains the treatment of choice for all patients with syphilis, the CDC has recommended that healthcare providers prioritize the use of Bicillin L-A® to treat pregnant people and babies with congenital syphilis. If warranted due to the drug shortage, healthcare providers may consider alternative treatment with doxycycline for non-pregnant individuals.

For indications outside of syphilis, healthcare providers should utilize alternative treatments. For example, alternative treatments should be utilized for step throat.

Recommendations

Healthcare providers should closely monitor their inventory of Bicillin L-A® and use their clinical judgement to further prioritize the use of Bicillin L-A®. If warranted due to the drug shortage, healthcare providers may consider alternate treatment with doxycycline. Bicillin L-A® remains the treatment of choice for all patients with syphilis and should be used when supply allows.

New Mexico Department of Health has provided an example of a prioritization strategy below that healthcare providers may consider utilizing in their efforts to ensure CDC priority populations have access to treatment for the duration of the drug shortage.

Bicillin L-A® Prioritization

Healthcare providers may consider prioritization of the following individuals diagnosed with syphilis for treatment with Bicillin L-A®:

- Pregnant individuals
 - Bicillin L-A® is the only acceptable treatment for this group
- Babies with congenital syphilis
- Sexual partners of pregnant individuals
- Women of childbearing age without consistent birth control
- Individuals with an allergy to doxycycline
- Individuals infected with HIV
- Individuals with early syphilis (primary, secondary, early latent)
- Individuals who have already initiated treatment with a 3-week course of Bicillin L-A®

Syphilis Alternate Treatment

If warranted due to the drug shortage, healthcare providers may consider treatment with doxycycline for non-pregnant individuals. Treat with doxycycline as follows:

- Early syphilis (primary, secondary, or early latent): Doxycycline 100mg by mouth twice daily for 14 days.
- Late syphilis (late latent or unknown duration): Doxycycline 100mg by mouth twice daily for 28 days.

Doxycycline is an FDA Pregnancy Category D medication. It is not an alternative treatment for pregnant individuals. Bicillin L-A® is the only recommended treatment for pregnant people infected with or exposed to syphilis.

Further Considerations

- Follow RPR titers to ensure a 4-fold decrease is achieved in 6 to 12 months.
- Patients receiving alternative treatment with doxycycline should receive education on the importance of adherence.
- Prioritization strategy will be periodically re-assessed to match available supply.

Resources

The New Mexico Department of Health on-call epidemiologist is available 24/7/365 at (505) 827-0006. Healthcare providers should not hesitate to call with questions regarding syphilis staging, treatment and prioritization efforts. Syphilis is a reportable condition in New Mexico. The sexually transmitted disease program can also assist in obtaining historical RPR titers for evaluating response to treatment or re-infection.

[FDA Drug Shortages](#)

[CDC - STD Treatment - Drug notices.](#)

[CDC STI Treatment Guidelines](#)

[Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance, 2021 \(cdc.gov\)](#)

New Mexico Health Alert Network: To register for the New Mexico Health Alert Network, click the following link to go directly to the HAN registration page <https://nm.readyop.com/fs/4cjZ/10b2> Please provide all information requested to begin receiving important health alerts and advisories.