



NEWS RELEASE
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Pregnant women urged to be tested for syphilis; congenital syphilis cases show increase

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) and the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AL-AAP) are concerned about an increase in congenital syphilis in Alabama. ADPH reported three cases of congenital syphilis per year in 2014 and 2015. Thus far in 2016, ADPH reports that at least ten infants have been born with this severe illness, including one stillbirth.

Cathy Wood, M.D., F.A.A.P., president of the AL-AAP, said, "Congenital syphilis is preventable by ensuring that women with syphilis are treated during pregnancy. This can prevent severe illness and even death in newborns." Congenital syphilis results from untreated syphilis in the infant's mother before delivery.

While women should be tested for syphilis during pregnancy, the health department noted that, with the most recent cases of congenital disease, eight of the ten mothers received either no prenatal care or prenatal care very late in pregnancy. ADPH is increasing its testing for syphilis by offering a free test to any woman who is not yet enrolled in prenatal care by the second trimester.

"The most important message I can provide pregnant women regarding syphilis is to be tested during pregnancy and get prenatal care," states Karen Landers, M.D., F.A.A.P., Assistant State Health Officer, ADPH.

Syphilis infection during pregnancy can result in significant health problems for an infant. As many as 40 percent of pregnancies in women with untreated syphilis will result in miscarriage, stillbirth or infant death. Infants who live may develop severe illness, including bone abnormalities, enlarged spleen, jaundice, anemia, eye problems, deafness, or brain inflammation causing developmental delay and seizures.

For further information regarding syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases, visit adph.org/std.

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12/12/16