

June 4, 2012

**HEALTH INFORMATION ADVISORY  
SYPHILIS INFECTIONS**

Within the last 45 days, the Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD) has identified 4 cases of early syphilis (less than one year duration) in young men who identify as having sex with other men. Since January of 2012, 6 cases have been identified; two of those having co-infection with HIV.

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. It has often been called "the great imitator" because so many of the signs and symptoms are indistinguishable from those of other diseases.

The primary stage of syphilis is usually marked by the appearance of a sore (called a chancre). The incubation period can range from 10 to 90 days (average 21 days). The chancre is usually firm, round, small, painless and appears where syphilis entered the body. The chancre lasts 3 to 6 weeks, and it heals without treatment.

Skin rash and mucous membrane lesions characterize the secondary stage. This stage typically starts with a rash on one or more areas of the body. Rashes associated with secondary syphilis can appear as the chancre is healing or several weeks after the chancre has healed. The characteristic rash of secondary syphilis may appear as rough, red, or reddish brown spots both on the palms of the hands and the bottoms of the feet. However, rashes with a different appearance may occur on other parts of the body, resembling rashes caused by other diseases. In addition, symptoms of secondary syphilis may include fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches, and fatigue.

The latent (hidden) stage of syphilis begins when primary and secondary symptoms disappear. Without treatment, the infected person will continue to have syphilis even though there are no signs or symptoms; infection remains in the body.

Syphilis is easy to cure in its early stages. A single intramuscular injection of penicillin will cure a person who has had syphilis for less than a year. *The WCHD has this medication in stock and provides treatment at no cost.*

You have received this notice because you are likely to see patients that may fit the initial profile. The WCHD is asking that you continue your laboratory screening efforts, as there is an estimated 2- to 5-fold increased risk of acquiring HIV if exposed to that infection when syphilis is present.

For additional information please call the WCHD at 815-720-4050.

Resources: [www.wchd.org](http://www.wchd.org); [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

***Service Locations***

401 Division St. Rockford, IL 61104-2014 (815)720-4000  
555 North Court St. Rockford, IL 61103-6862 (815)720-4000  
330 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue Rockford, IL 61104-5155 (815) 972-7200

***Mailing address for all locations: 401 Division St. P.O. Box 4009 Rockford, IL 61110-0509***

***[www.wchd.org](http://www.wchd.org)***