

April 11, 2008

Colleagues,

We are seeing a substantial increase in the number of early syphilis cases among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Marion and surrounding counties. While there have been syphilis outbreaks among MSM nationally, disease has been well controlled here. The increase is particularly concerning now because

- a. We have reached the threshold for an outbreak
- b. Many of cases are co-infected with HIV
- c. Few of the cases are linked to one another and infected individuals have been less forthcoming with information about their partners than previously.

We are asking your help. Please

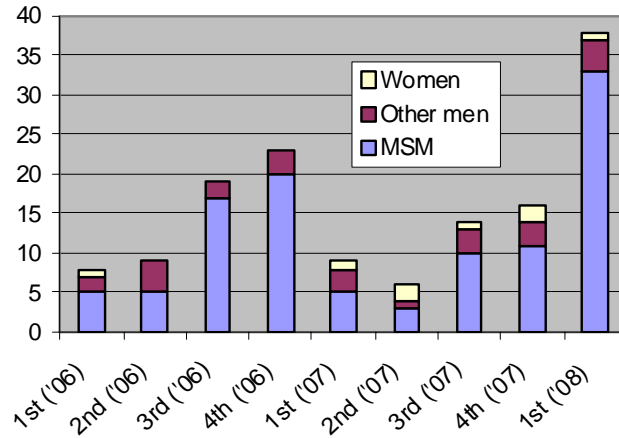
1. **Tell** your patients about it
2. Have a **high index of suspicion**, and **draw an RPR** on men who have sex with men and HIV positive patients. Don't wait for an FTA to return to treat those with classic signs or RPR positive cases, especially if the RPR is $\geq 1:4$.
3. Make sure your lab does an **automatic Treponemal Antibody** (e.g. FTA) and titers all positive RPR's.
4. **Treat with 2.4 million units of Benzathine Penicillin** (Bicillin L-A) as soon as possible, reserving doxycycline for serious penicillin allergy.
5. **Report any positive RPR within 24 hours** to Coya Campbell at 221-8347 or after hours to me at 312-1442.

Perspective and Details:

In 2000, we developed a CDC-requested "Rapid Outbreak Response Plan" to limit future syphilis outbreaks. A syphilis outbreak threshold was defined based on the number of cases seen in recent non-outbreak months. For the 2006-2007 non-outbreak period, the threshold is 7 primary and secondary cases. Applying the algorithm to total early latent syphilis, that is primary, secondary and early latent infection, the number is 9.

In the first 2 quarters of 2007, 16 cases were reported, in the second two quarters, 30 cases were reported. So far this year we have identified 46 cases of early syphilis compared to 47 cases for all of 2007.

Forty four of the cases are men and two are women. 13 are black and 33 are white. Patients range in age from 21 to 59, average 37 years. They reside more than 20 different zip codes. Of the ones whose results are known, 27 are HIV positive, 1 was newly diagnosed with HIV infection and 16 were negative or refused testing.



Fifteen cases were diagnosed at Bell Flower while others were reported from more than 20 different providers. Most patients met partners online, in bars or in the baths. Many had traveled to other cities including Atlanta, Chicago, New Orleans, New York, St Louis, Tennessee and Virginia Beach. In addition to these cases, there are also a few young men with high titer RPR's that are less well defined.

There have been several instances where a case was seen by a provider, but not tested or diagnosed. Typically patients are presenting with penile lesions or rash, but we have seen at least 2 recent cases of ocular syphilis.

Please don't hesitate to call me with questions.

Respectfully,

Janet N. Arno

Janet N. Arno, M.D.
 Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine
 Indiana University School of Medicine
 Medical Director
 Bell Flower Clinic
 1101 West Tenth Street
 Indianapolis, IN 46202
 Phone: 317-221-8360
 FAX: 317-221-8340
 Pager: 317-312-1442