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URGENT HEALTH BULLETIN

Bicillin® L-A Shortage and Syphilis Treatment Prioritization

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June 26, 2023

Dear Kern County Healthcare Provider:

This urgent health bulletin is being sent to call your attention to an ongoing event which may impact Kern County residents and healthcare facilities.

Summary

Bicillin® L-A, the first-line recommended treatment for syphilis is currently in short supply. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), and the Kern County Public Health Department (KCPH) recommends all providers prioritize this medication for the most high-risk populations.

Background

The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov/) and the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](https://www.fda.gov/) have announced and listed long-acting penicillin G benzathine injectable suspension products (Bicillin® L-A) on their respective drug shortage webpages. [Pfizer](https://www.pfizer.com/), the manufacturer of Bicillin® L-A, has indicated that both the 1.2 million Units/2 mL and the 2.4 million Units/4 mL formulations are currently in limited supply and expected to remain so through the second quarter of 2024 due to increased product demand. In addition, the pediatric formulation (600,000 units/mL) has a next delivery approximation of January 2024 and does not currently have an estimated recovery time from shortage.

Benzathine penicillin G is the recommended first-line treatment for syphilis and the only recommended treatment for pregnant people. Timely, adequate treatment of syphilis during pregnancy is highly effective at preventing congenital syphilis.

Kern County has some of the highest rates of syphilis and congenital syphilis in the state. Healthcare providers in Kern County report experiencing the effects of the drug shortage, including delayed shipments and backordered requests with no expected fulfillment dates.

Recommendations for Healthcare Providers and Healthcare Facilities

- Due to the current shortage of Bicillin® L-A drug shortage, Kern County Public Health recommends prioritizing Bicillin® L-A for treatment of syphilis in the following populations:
 - Pregnant persons with confirmed syphilis infection or exposure
 - Infants exposed to syphilis in utero
 - Persons with confirmed syphilis infection or exposure with contraindications to doxycycline (e.g. anaphylaxis, hemolytic anemia, Stevens Johnson syndrome)

- All other populations are recommended to receive the alternate treatment regimen per [CDC STD Treatment Guidelines](#):
 - Doxycycline 100 mg PO BID x 14 days for early syphilis (primary, secondary, or early latent syphilis)
 - Doxycycline 100 mg PO BID x 28 days for late latent syphilis or syphilis of unknown syphilis

Healthcare providers are encouraged to follow up with patients prescribed doxycycline to confirm treatment adherence and document treatment completion in the medical record.


- Healthcare providers are recommended to conserve Bicillin® L-A by using alternative drugs for the treatment of other infectious conditions where other medications or antimicrobials are available.

Currently, there is no data to determine how effective treatment is when combining Bicillin® L-A with doxycycline. Therefore, the safest, most conservative option for the treatment of late latent syphilis or syphilis of unknown duration following one or two doses of Bicillin® L-A is to prescribe the full 28-day course of doxycycline.

In accordance with California Code of Regulations, Title 17, Section 2505, specimens submitted for laboratory testing related to a reportable condition (such as syphilis) shall include the pregnancy status of the person for whom the specimen was submitted. Similarly, Section 2500 requires healthcare providers to provide the pregnancy status of the patient as part of the submission of a reportable condition. Reporting the pregnancy status of patients with syphilis infection expedites the prioritization of treatment and follow up.

If you have any questions, please contact KCPH by phone at 661-321-3000, via email at publichealth@kerncounty.com, or visit the [KCPH website](#).

Thank you,


Kristopher Lyon, MD
Health Officer