

Guide for Parents

Congenital Syphilis



Public Health
Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health

Congenital syphilis (CS) is a serious yet preventable condition that occurs when syphilis is transmitted from a pregnant person to their baby. Without timely testing and treatment, it can cause severe and lasting damage to a newborn's vital organs. From 2022 to 2024, San Bernardino County reported 134 cases. These cases affected Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American babies more often. We work to prevent congenital syphilis, ensuring that pregnant individuals receive early testing and treatment right away.

Data Snapshot

(CalREDIE)

Common risk factors found amongst the 134 cases reported in 2022 to 2024:



56%

experienced lack of prenatal care.



19%

were treated too late in pregnancy.



17%

did not receive the correct treatment.

Quick Facts

- Syphilis is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- You can get syphilis if you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has it.
- CS can affect anyone if syphilis is undiagnosed or untreated during pregnancy.
- Key risk factors include lack of prenatal care, getting screened too late, and not getting the right treatment.
- Many babies appear healthy at birth but can develop symptoms later.

Resources

Call 800-722-4777 to make an appointment to any [San Bernardino County Clinic Services](#).

[American Academy of Pediatrics. Congenital Syphilis: What Parents Need to Know.](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\). About Congenital Syphilis.](#)

[March of Dimes. Protect Your Baby From Syphilis.](#)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

1. What is congenital syphilis (CS)?

Congenital syphilis happens when a pregnant person who is not treated for syphilis passes the infection to their baby during pregnancy or birth. It can cause the baby to be born too early, be stillborn, or die soon after birth.

2. How is it spread and what are the symptoms?

CS happens when a pregnant person has syphilis that is not treated. Babies can have problems like bone changes, yellowing of the skin or eyes, brain or nerve problems, or skin rashes. Some babies may not show signs right away, and symptoms can appear later. If not treated quickly, this illness can cause serious health problems.

3. Is congenital syphilis preventable or treatable?

Syphilis can be treated with antibiotics. Testing during pregnancy can greatly lower the chance of passing it to your baby. Most cases of CS happen when testing or treatment is missed. This means good prenatal care can prevent most cases.

4. What should you do to protect your baby?

- Get prenatal care as early as possible and ask for STI testing. Testing is best when pregnancy is confirmed, later in pregnancy, and at delivery.
- If you are diagnosed, finish all the treatment your doctor recommends. Make sure your partner is treated too so you do not get infected again.
- Go to all follow-up appointments and keep getting the care your doctor recommends during pregnancy to protect your baby.
- If you have trouble getting healthcare, contact local public health clinics or free STI clinics for help.

