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**LAC DPH Health Advisory:  
Bicillin L-A®  
(Benzathine Penicillin G) Shortage**

June 2, 2016



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*This message is intended for obstetrics/gynecology, family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, and urgent care providers.  
Please distribute as appropriate.*

### **Key messages**

- **There is a national shortage of Bicillin-LA® (benzathine penicillin G).**
- **Benzathine penicillin G is the only recommended treatment for pregnant women with syphilis and should be prioritized for the treatment of pregnant women infected with or exposed to syphilis.**

### **Situation**

Benzathine penicillin G (BPG) is the recommended treatment for syphilis and the only recommended treatment for pregnant women infected with or exposed to syphilis. Pfizer, the sole manufacturer of Bicillin L-A® (benzathine penicillin G) in the United States, is experiencing a manufacturing delay of this product. The [Food and Drug Administration](#) estimates that the shortage should resolve by July 2016.

This is of particular concern in Los Angeles County because we are experiencing a significant increase in syphilis, as are many parts of California, including syphilis among pregnant women and congenital syphilis among infants. BPG treatment of syphilis in pregnancy is nearly 100% effective at preventing the potentially devastating outcomes associated with congenital syphilis.

Until normal quantities of Bicillin L-A® are ensured, it is critical that adequate reserves are maintained.

### **Actions requested of providers**

- ✓ Use only BPG to treat syphilis in pregnancy. There are no acceptable alternatives.
- ✓ Review stocks of BPG to ensure adequate supply for patients infected with or exposed to syphilis who cannot be treated with doxycycline, including all pregnant women (see sections below).
- ✓ Refrain from the use of BPG for treatment of other infectious diseases (e.g., streptococcal pharyngitis) where other effective antimicrobials are available.
- ✓ Adhere to the recommended dosing regimen of 2.4 million units of benzathine penicillin G IM for the treatment of primary, secondary and early latent syphilis (i.e., early syphilis) as outlined in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [2015 STD Treatment Guidelines](#). *Additional doses to treat early syphilis do not enhance efficacy, including in patients living with HIV.*

## **Ensuring adequate benzathine penicillin G supply**

If your clinic routinely treats patients with syphilis, please work with your pharmacy/pharmaceutical distributor to ensure adequate reserves of BPG.

If you have a critical shortage of BPG (less than 3 weeks supply) or if you have a surplus that could be shared with other healthcare agencies please contact the Los Angeles County DPH's Division of HIV and STD Programs (DHSP) Clinical Nursing Unit at (213) 744-3106.

## **Prioritization planning and alternative treatment regimens for syphilis**

BPG remains the recommended therapy to treat syphilis. However, doxycycline is an alternative treatment for syphilis (in non-pregnant patients) and may be used if BPG is in short supply. Other formulations of penicillin, including Bicillin C-R<sup>®</sup>, are NOT acceptable alternatives to Bicillin L-A<sup>®</sup> for syphilis treatment.

If your stocks of BPG are low, the following doxycycline regimens can be used:

- Early syphilis (primary, secondary, and early latent): doxycycline 100mg PO BID x 14 days.
- Late latent syphilis: doxycycline 100mg PO BID x 28 days.

Follow-up clinical and serologic evaluation should be performed after treatment at the recommended intervals per the [CDC 2015 STD Treatment Guidelines](#).

Note: doxycycline is contraindicated in pregnant women and young children.

Patients who are allergic to doxycycline or cannot tolerate it, or in whom there are serious concerns about adherence (e.g., patients with unstable housing, or history of methamphetamine or opioid use) should be prioritized for BPG.

Whenever possible, treat early syphilis (primary, secondary, early latent) with BPG. These are the most infectious stages of syphilis and direct administration of one 2.4 MU dose of BPG interrupts transmission. Note: additional doses to treat early syphilis do not enhance efficacy, including in patients living with HIV.

Please contact the DHSP Clinical Nursing Unit at (213) 744-3106 if you are treating a syphilis patient who cannot receive doxycycline and BPG is not in stock.

## **Local resources**

*Los Angeles County*

Contact DHSP Clinical Nursing Unit at (213) 744-3106 if you have any further questions about the penicillin shortage or treatment of syphilis.

View the DPH STD Clinic schedule and contact information at:

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/chs/Docs/STDSchedule.pdf>

*Long Beach*

Contact the Clinical Services Director at (562) 570-4379 regarding local BPG shortage.

*Pasadena*

Call Public Health Nursing at (626) 744-6089 regarding local BPG shortage.

**For more information**

- CDC on Bicillin-LA<sup>®</sup> shortage:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/drugnotices/bicillinshortage.htm>
- FDA on Bicillin-LA<sup>®</sup> injection shortage:  
[http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/drugshortages/dsp\\_ActiveIngredientDetails.cfm?AI=Penicillin%20G%20Benzathine%20\(Bicillin%20L-A\)%20Injection&st=c&tab=tabs-](http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/drugshortages/dsp_ActiveIngredientDetails.cfm?AI=Penicillin%20G%20Benzathine%20(Bicillin%20L-A)%20Injection&st=c&tab=tabs-)
- Recommended syphilis treatment and clinical management can be found in the CDC 2015 STD Treatment Guidelines: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/syphilis.htm>

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