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Clinical Advisory Regarding Ocular Syphilis in California

Since December 2014, several cases of ocular syphilis cases have been reported in San Francisco, Orange County, San Diego, and San Mateo, CA, and Seattle, WA. Cases are also under investigation in Los Angeles County. Affected individuals have included both HIV-infected and uninfected men who have sex with men as well as heterosexual men. Several of the cases have resulted in a significant and permanent decline in visual acuity, including blindness. Certain strains of *Treponema pallidum*, the bacterium that causes syphilis, may be more likely to cause central nervous system (CNS) and ocular disease. *T. pallidum* can affect many ocular structures in both the anterior and posterior segment of the eye. Manifestations can include (but are not limited to) uveitis, optic neuropathy, keratitis and retinal vasculitis.

Requests for medical providers, including eye care providers and HIV providers:

- 1) Clinicians should be on the alert for ocular syphilis, and should order a syphilis serology test** (e.g., rapid plasma reagin, RPR) **in patients with visual complaints who have risk factors for syphilis.** Risk factors for syphilis include having sex with multiple or anonymous partners, sex in conjunction with illicit drug use, or having a sex partner who engages in any of these behaviors.
- 2) Patients with positive syphilis serology and ocular complaints should receive immediate ophthalmologic evaluation.**
- 3) Patients with suspected ocular syphilis should receive a lumbar puncture (LP) and be treated for neurosyphilis** (regardless of LP results) according to guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (i.e., intravenous penicillin G or intramuscular procaine penicillin plus oral probenecid for 10-14 days). Providers should refer to: [2010 STD Treatment Guidelines](http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2010/default.htm) (www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2010/default.htm) for more information.
- 4) All patients with syphilis should be tested for HIV if not already known to be HIV-infected.**
- 5) Cases of ocular syphilis should be reported to the local health department within 1 business day. Contact information for your health department is available at: [California Department of Public Health Health Information website](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCLHO/Pages/LHD%20Contact%20Information.aspx)** (https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCLHO/Pages/LHD%20Contact%20Information.aspx). This can be done by telephone or by using a Confidential Morbidity Report (CMR) form which is available at the [Confidential Morbidity Report form pdf](#). Information on how to fill out the form is available at [CDPH Document instructions pdf](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/CMR-CA-How-to-Report.pdf) (https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/CMR-CA-How-to-Report.pdf).

For additional consultation regarding clinical management of syphilis, contact the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) STD Control Branch provider warm-line at (510) 620-3400 or by email at stdcb@cdph.ca.gov, 8 AM - 5 PM, M-F.