

DATE: July 12, 2019

TO: Public Health, Clinical and Laboratory Leads

FROM: Dr. Mark Gilbert, BCCDC and Chair, Syphilis Outbreak Response Committee

RE: Communication update for interim guidance on Perinatal Syphilis Screening

The Provincial Health Officer (PHO), Dr. Bonnie Henry, recently declared an expansion of the ongoing outbreak of syphilis in BC to include perinatal populations, in recognition of increasing syphilis cases in females and two recent congenital syphilis cases (the first in the province since 2013).

The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has been asked by the PHO to form a syphilis outbreak response committee (SORC) and work with key stakeholders to address the outbreak. The response being developed includes implementing an interim perinatal screening guideline to identify and treat cases of maternal and congenital syphilis to prevent complications. The interim guideline recommends testing pregnant individuals twice for syphilis, once in the first trimester or at their first prenatal visit, and again at delivery.

Perinatal Services BC (PSBC) and BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre (BC Women's) are fully engaged in planning and implementing the response to the perinatal syphilis outbreak. To date, the PHSA programs have together generated an interim guideline, a set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) and a clinical algorithm to support clinicians who provide perinatal care. We are now starting to draft messaging for patients to help them understand the rationale behind this additional syphilis test at delivery.

The implementation of the interim guideline has significant implications for laboratory services throughout the province. The interim guideline is being finalized and will be distributed once supporting educational materials are in place. We invite stakeholders to prepare their own organizations and staff to implement the guideline once it is released. This could include identifying sample collection procedures, liaising with nursing and laboratory personnel, and/or engaging with staff that are asking for direction and explaining that the guideline is not yet implemented.

We will continue to update you and share the final resources when the interim guidelines are ready to be implemented.

For more information please contact:

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