HHS Announces $4 Million Initiative to Expand Rapid Syphilis Testing and Treatment to Protect Mothers and Babies

Nearly 4,000 cases of congenital syphilis were reported in 2024, a nearly 700% increase over the past decade.

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) today announced a $4 million initiative to expand access to rapid point-of-care syphilis testing, with a focus on reaching women in emergency departments and other nontraditional healthcare settings.

“Congenital syphilis is preventable, yet too many mothers and babies are still suffering its devastating consequences,” said HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. “HHS is putting rapid tests where women receive care so we can detect infections earlier, treat them faster, and protect more babies.”

Congenital syphilis cases have risen for 12 consecutive years, with nearly 4,000 cases reported in 2024—a nearly 700% increase over the past decade. In 2023, congenital syphilis contributed to 279 stillbirths and infant deaths. An estimated 83% of congenital syphilis cases that year could have been prevented with timely testing and treatment.

Syphilis during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death and lifelong medical complications. Yet more than 40% of pregnant women who delivered a baby with congenital syphilis in 2023 did not receive a syphilis test in time to receive adequate treatment before delivery.

Point-of-care syphilis tests can provide rapid results, allowing healthcare providers to begin treatment immediately rather than waiting for traditional laboratory testing. Expanding access to these tests can help close gaps in care, particularly for women who may not regularly receive care in traditional clinical settings.

Through the new initiative, HHS is directing funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of STD Prevention to increase access to point-of-care testing and treatment.

HHS is providing approximately $3.25 million in supplemental awards to recipients of CDC's Strengthening STD Prevention and Control for Health Departments cooperative agreement (PS19-1901) to expand access to syphilis point-of-care testing and link patients to care from August 2026 through February 2027. Awarded jurisdictions have been identified as experiencing a high burden of syphilis and congenital syphilis. Remaining funding will support national partners providing technical assistance and implementation support.

The initiative will promote syphilis screening and treatment beyond traditional healthcare settings and strengthen partnerships across public health programs. Emergency departments, maternal and child health programs, correctional intake settings, substance use treatment programs, and other settings can provide additional opportunities to identify and treat syphilis, including during pregnancy.

By expanding rapid testing and strengthening collaboration across sectors, HHS aims to reduce missed opportunities for diagnosis and treatment, prevent congenital syphilis, and improve health outcomes for mothers and babies.

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