

Congenital Syphilis Is on the Rise

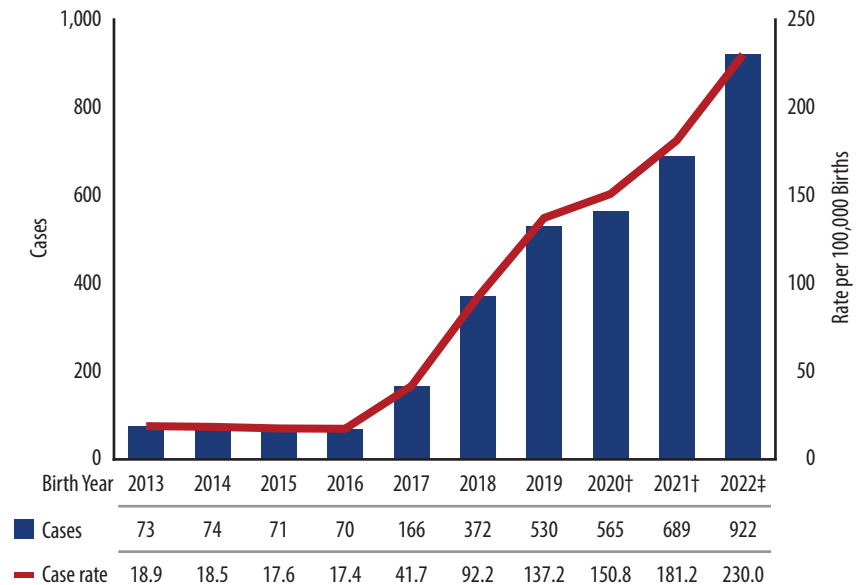
What Is Congenital Syphilis (CS)?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). CS occurs when a pregnant woman with inadequately treated syphilis passes it to her baby during pregnancy or delivery.

CS can cause problems for the baby and mother, including miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, birth defects, or other serious health issues. Some babies born with CS do not show symptoms at birth.

Penicillin treats babies diagnosed with CS.* Newborns must receive treatment immediately, or they could develop serious health problems months or even years later. Babies must also get the proper examination, evaluation, treatment, and follow-up as needed with a pediatric infectious disease doctor as needed.

Texas Congenital Syphilis Cases and Rates by Year of Diagnosis, 2013-2022



How Common Is CS?

In the US, the number of CS cases has increased annually since 2013. Texas CS cases have increased nearly 148 percent since 2018 when Texas reported 372 cases.† In 2022, Texas reported 922 cases at a case rate of 230.0 cases per 100,000 live births.‡

Do I Need to Get Tested for Syphilis?

Yes. Getting tested for syphilis and other STDs is part of routine prenatal care tests. [Texas Health and Safety Code Section §81.090](#) requires syphilis testing for pregnant women three times during pregnancy:

1. At the **first prenatal visit**,
2. In the **third trimester** (no sooner than 28 weeks gestation or six and a half months into your pregnancy), and
3. Again, at **delivery**.

If you have not had your blood drawn for syphilis and HIV testing during visits with your doctor, ask about testing options at your next appointment. People sometimes mistake syphilis symptoms for other things. A person



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of State
Health Services

with syphilis may experience symptoms, remain asymptomatic, or have symptoms that disappear without treatment. Symptoms include: sores in the mouth or genital areas and rashes on the hands, feet, back, chest, or stomach. The only way to know for sure if you have syphilis is to get a simple blood test.

You can find out your syphilis status by getting tested regularly at your annual wellness exam. You may need to ask for the test since syphilis, HIV, and other STD tests are not routine parts of most physicals or pap tests.

What Should I Do If I Am Diagnosed with Syphilis?

If you receive a syphilis diagnosis, start treatment right away and complete it while following medical advice. If you are pregnant when you get treated, your baby gets treated, too! Doctors can treat and cure syphilis with antibiotics. Talk to your doctor about what stage of syphilis you have and your options for treatment. If your doctor cannot get the type of penicillin needed to treat syphilis, your local health department can help provide it. Contact them for more information and assistance.

Make sure your partner(s) receives treatment, too. If your partner is not treated, you may get syphilis again, and you will need treatment again. Your local health department can help with getting you and your partner(s) tested and treated.

When Should I Start Prenatal Care?

If you think you are pregnant, you should see a doctor. Starting prenatal care early and getting frequent checkups help you and your baby stay healthy. If you do not have insurance or worry about the cost of prenatal care, you have options. You can learn more about [Texas Benefits for Pregnant Women](#) or contact Texas Pregnancy Care Network at 877-345-7734. Additionally, you can access information about available. [Texas Benefits online](#).

Where Can I Get Tested for Syphilis and Other STDs?

Many clinics in your area offer testing and treatment, when needed at low or no cost, or you can find a doctor through [Healthy Texas Women](#) for all you women's health needs.

Resources

STD testing locations - dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/testing/

Texas Benefits for Pregnant Women - hhs.texas.gov/services/health/medicaid-chip/programs-services/women/medicaid-pregnant-women-chip-perinatal

Texas Benefits - yourtexasbenefits.com

Healthy Texas Women - healthytexaswomen.org/find-doctor

Find your local health department - dshs.texas.gov/regional-local-health-operations/public-health-regions/texas-local-public-health

Fast Facts

Syphilis is curable
at every stage

Penicillin is the only medication
doctors can use to treat syphilis
during pregnancy

Syphilis can pass to the
baby at any time during
the pregnancy

CS is preventable

DSHS HIV/STD Program

737-255-4300

dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/

Publication No. 13-15765

(Rev. 3/2024)



Texas Benefits for
Pregnant Women



Texas Benefits

* Given by an IV for 10 days or once by injection depending on the doctor's

examination, evaluation, and medical opinion.

† DSHS based 2020, 2021, and 2022 CS case rates on provisional 2020, 2021, and 2022 birth data.

‡ 2022 data are provisional.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of State
Health Services