



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

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Medical Alert – Syphilis Update

The infectious syphilis outbreak in the Northwestern Health Unit catchment area is ongoing, and rates continue to increase. In 2021, incidence rates increased by 107% from 2020. The most common risk factors remain no condom used, injection drug use/substance use, multiple sex partners and being underhoused/homeless. The majority of cases are in the Kenora, Fort Frances, and Sioux Lookout Health Hubs.

Please consider:

- Testing for syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for those who are at risk.
 - Unprotected sex with multiple partners, substance use, incarceration, homeless or unstable housing, those requesting STI testing, those with a confirmed or suspected STI, men who have sex with men, or having a sexual partner with any of the above risk factors.
- Testing during pregnancy:
 - Universal screening of all pregnant women during the first trimester.
 - **Screening test should be repeated at 28-32 weeks and again at delivery for ALL pregnant women**
 - More frequent re-screening may be considered based on risk factors
- Testing for syphilis in patients with compatible symptoms including a primary chancre, maculopapular rash involving the palms and soles or other signs of syphilis
- Providing risk reduction counselling to patients on the importance of condoms and dental dams; they are available from NWHU at no charge for distribution through your clinic.
- Treatment for STIs can be made available at no charge; please contact NWHU to arrange for free medication through your clinic.
- Completing NWHU forms for cases – this supports epidemiological and surveillance efforts

Resources for Health Care Providers

Information and supports for health care providers and the most recent epidemiological report are available at the [NWHU - Syphilis](#) webpage.

The Public Health Agency of Canada's recently updated the Sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections: Guides for health professionals are available [here](#).

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