

PRESS RELEASE



Cook County DEPT. of Public Health

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
10/07/24

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Cook County “Syphilis Stops with Me” Awareness Campaign Seeks to Educate Women of Childbearing Age to Prevent Newborn Syphilis

Regular syphilis testing, treatment and prenatal care could prevent 90% of congenital syphilis cases

FOREST PARK, IL - Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) launched the "Syphilis Stops with Me" campaign today, to arm women of childbearing age with the knowledge they can protect their unborn babies from congenital (newborn) syphilis by getting regular prenatal care, including testing and treatment for syphilis, a common sexually transmitted infection (STI).

"Syphilis during pregnancy can cause tragic outcomes – including stillbirths, miscarriages, premature birth or low birthweight – but the good news is, 90 percent of congenital syphilis cases could be prevented with timely testing and treatment during pregnancy," said Cook County Department of Public Health Chief Operating Officer Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck.

Congenital syphilis cases are on the rise in suburban Cook County and nationally. In suburban Cook County, congenital syphilis cases almost tripled from four cases in 2020 to 11 cases in 2021. There were 10 cases in 2022. Nationally, there was a ten-fold increase in congenital syphilis cases from 2012 to 2022, when more than 3,700 babies were born with syphilis, according to new CDC data.

People from racial and ethnic minority groups are experiencing the brunt of the congenital syphilis epidemic. While congenital syphilis cases are increasing overall, babies born to Black, Hispanic, or American Indian/Alaska Native mothers were up to 8 times more likely to have newborn syphilis in 2021, than babies born to White mothers. In suburban Cook County, nearly 90% of congenital syphilis cases occur in babies born to persons of color. Of the 21 suburban Cook County congenital syphilis cases between 2021-2022, 13 (62%) were born to non-Hispanic Black/African American mothers, and 6 (29%) were born to Hispanic/Latinx mothers.

While rates of primary and secondary syphilis have remained stable locally, the rates have been increasing nationally. In 2022, over 52,000 cases of primary and secondary syphilis were reported in the U.S. – the highest number in more than two decades.

The "Syphilis Stops with Me" campaign will run Sept. 30 through Nov. 24, 2024, and attempt to reach and engage Black and Latinx women and birthing persons ages 18 to 44 years old who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Campaign strategies include use of social media and digital ads, influencers who focus on reproductive health, and educational brochures at healthcare providers' offices in priority ZIP codes.

To learn more about syphilis, congenital syphilis, prenatal care, testing and treatment, visit the [Syphilis Stops with Me website](#). To view the most recent suburban Cook County syphilis and congenital syphilis data, click [here](#).

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