



Department of Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

SALLY DRESLIN, M.S., R.N.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

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Dear Provider:

In response to the continued increases in syphilis, the New York State Department of Health, AIDS Institute is asking all AIDS Institute contractors, particularly those who serve gay men and men who have sex with men, to post syphilis alert information on their agency websites, as well as program websites that are tailored to gay men and men who have sex with men.

Website Alert Language

SYPHILIS ALERT

Infectious syphilis is increasing in New York State, with a 13 percent increase in New York City and a 44 percent increase in Upstate New York between 2013 and 2014. In many Central New York and Capital District counties, the number of cases has more than doubled in this period. The highest burden of cases is seen in New York City and surrounding counties. Cases are mainly among males, especially gay men and men who have sex with men.

All clients of <AGENCY/PROGRAM NAME> should be aware of the risk factors, signs, and symptoms of syphilis. Having unprotected sex, multiple sex partners, or a new sex partner can all increase the risk of syphilis infection, as well as other STDs and HIV.

Syphilis symptoms include a large painless sore at the infection site (usually genitals, can also be around the rectum, mouth, or other areas) and a rash, usually on the hands and feet. These symptoms will go away on their own but the infection is still in the body.

Syphilis increases your risk of getting HIV if you are exposed. Syphilis is easy to transmit, and many people don't have symptoms. Using condoms does reduce the risk of infection. If you are serosorting or using pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent HIV, remember that these strategies do not protect against syphilis and other STDs.

[AGENCIES THAT PROVIDE DIRECT SYPHILIS/STD TESTING]

To learn more about syphilis, visit <AGENCY SYPHILIS URL or <http://bit.ly/NYSDOHSyph>>. Call <AGENCY TESTING NUMBER> to schedule a test, or stop in at one of our events.

[AGENCIES THAT DO NOT PROVIDE DIRECT SYPHILIS TESTING]

To learn more about syphilis, visit <AGENCY SYPHILIS URL or <http://bit.ly/NYSDOHSyph>>. Visit www.findSTDtest.com to find a Syphilis testing location near you.

In addition, we encourage agencies to utilize social media to educate communities about syphilis and promote syphilis testing. A good strategy for taking a social media approach to syphilis is to ask clients, through one-on-one conversations or a focus group, what sort of messages resonate with them. The AIDS Institute recommends using the information learned

through these conversations to design content that has a high likelihood of engaging the right audiences.

The AIDS Institute has also compiled sample messages contractors may use. These have been used by and/or modified from other agency and individual social media user posts. We encourage agencies to discuss using these and other social media messaging with your agency's leadership, public relations, and/or communications team, as well as involve consumers in further social media development. Please feel free to modify messages and use photos/graphics that will resonate with your consumers. The social media messages provided are designed for Twitter, but can be incorporated into other social media platforms, with potential for additional language (Facebook) and photos relevant to your communities.

Sample Social Media Messages

- You know who you took home last night but didn't know he left you a surprise. Get tested. Syphilis is back.
- Ever wonder if the guy you had sex with left something behind? Syphilis is back. Get tested.
- Did you take something home you didn't want? Get tested, syphilis is back.
- Asked his status but forgot about STDs? Syphilis is back. Get tested.

- Hey man, this is the third soap you bought—that rash isn't from the soap you're using. Get tested, syphilis is back.
- Dude- I don't think that's from biting your lip. It could be a sign of syphilis. Get tested.
- I know it's hot, but that's no heat rash. Get tested. Syphilis is on the rise.
- Sores and rashes that went away? Probably not magic, but could be syphilis. It's back, so get tested.

- Finding hot sex online may not be all you find. Get tested, syphilis is back.
- Hey, he said he was clean--maybe he didn't know... Syphilis is back. Get tested.
- His profile said clean... guess he only meant HIV. Syphilis is back. Get tested.
- I asked if he was HIV negative—didn't think about STDs. Syphilis is on the rise. Get tested.
- The profile said negative as of 7/1/15—negative for what? Syphilis is back. Get tested.

- That big 'S' doesn't stand for Superman... it's Syphilis. Get tested, be a hero!
- Does your 'Iron Man' look a little rusty? It could be syphilis. Get tested, be a hero!
- Does his 'Hulk' look a little worse for wear? Syphilis is on the rise, so get tested. Be a hero!
- Is your 'Human Torch' not quite as bright? It could be syphilis. Get tested. Be a hero!

As a reminder, we ask that all agencies continue to incorporate syphilis education and testing or active referral in your consumer interactions. Please refer to the letter sent on April 22, 2015 for guidance and tools to help in your efforts. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your contract manager.

Thank you.



Dan O'Connell
Director
AIDS Institute