

# I'M A GP WITH A SYPHILIS PATIENT

## Pre-emptive Treatment

- The Australian STI Management Guidelines recommend that clinicians presumptively treat all sexual contacts of patients with primary or secondary syphilis with Benzathine penicillin 2.4 million IU intramuscularly, stat, if serological test results are not available immediately and the opportunity for follow-up is uncertain.
- Benzathine penicillin is usually administered in two 900mg doses, and is different to benzylpenicillin.
- Contacts of early latent syphilis can also be treated presumptively, but if the contact was greater than 3 months previous, treatment can be given according to the serology result.
- Discussion with a sexual health specialist is recommended for patients allergic to penicillin, who are pregnant, have HIV co-infection or if the GP is uncertain on management.

## Accessing Benzathine Benzylpenicillin

- Benzathine Benzylpenicillin is now available through the **Prescriber Bag** scheme. As a GP you can order a box of Benzathine Benzylpenicillin (Bicillin L-A) each month (i.e. 10 injections or 5 treatments per month) for free so that you can supply to your patients for emergency use. For more information visit [pbs.gov.au/browse/doctorsbag](https://pbs.gov.au/browse/doctorsbag)
  - Patients may find it difficult to access Benzathine penicillin (Bicillin-LA) from a community pharmacy. In general, pharmacists will be able to order Bicillin-LA for a patient and it be ready for collection the following day. However, greater delays may be experienced for patients in regional or remote areas.
  - If a patient is unable to access the medication from a community pharmacy, the below options are available to you.
1. The patient can be referred to a public sexual health clinic for further management and treatment.
    - Royal Perth Sexual Health Clinic, Level 4, Ainslie House, Royal Perth Hospital, 48 Murray St, Perth WA 6000. Phone: (08) 9224 2178 and Fax: (08) 9224 3557
    - South Terrace Sexual Health Clinic, A Block, Fremantle Hospital, South Terrace, Fremantle WA 6160. Phone: (08) 9431 2149
  2. You may contact Metropolitan Communicable Disease Control (MCDC) who can assist you in accessing a supply of Benzathine penicillin. Phone (08) 9222-8588, or Email [ContactMCDC@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:ContactMCDC@health.wa.gov.au)

## Testing

- Syphilis serology must be requested.
- Diagnosis may be confirmed by direct identification of *Treponema pallidum* from an ulcer swab using NAAT testing.
- People who are contacts of Syphilis may also be at risk for other STIs, HIV and blood-borne virus. The following tests are also recommended for men who have sex with other men: Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea (throat/urine/anus), Hepatitis A, B and C serology, HIV serology (if HIV-negative).
- If the patient tests positive to syphilis, clinical follow-up should be provided in line with the Department of Health, Western Australia Silver book – Guidelines for managing sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne viruses.

## Safer Sex

- Provide sexual health education and prevention counselling to the patient.
- The patient may be a candidate for, and interested in using, Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to reduce their HIV risk. PrEP is highly effective, listed on the PBS and can be prescribed and managed by any GP. Please refer to the PrEP Prescribing Guidelines posted by ASHM to determine their eligibility.

The information in this guide is taken from the following sources. Please refer to these for more information.

- Department of Health, Western Australia Silver book – Guidelines for managing sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne viruses: <http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Silver-book/Notifiable-infections/SyphilisAustralian>
- STI Management Guidelines for use in Primary care: <http://www.sti.guidelines.org.au/sexually-transmissible-infections/syphilis>
- Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis: clinical guidelines. Update April 2018: <https://www.ashm.org.au/HIV/PrEP/>