



Date: May 20, 2008

To: San Francisco HIV Medical Care Providers and Clinic Administrators

From: Jeffrey D. Klausner, MD, MPH  
Deputy Health Officer, STD Controller  
Director, STD Prevention and Control Services

Re: Updated Syphilis Screening Recommendations in HIV-infected Patients

While syphilis rates have declined from their peak in 2004, syphilis remains endemic, particularly among HIV-infected gay men and other MSM in San Francisco. In 2007 there were 361 new cases of syphilis of which 65% were in HIV-infected MSM. Because syphilis in HIV-infected persons can increase HIV viral load and decrease CD4 T cell counts as well as enhance the spread of HIV, routine and regular screening is of medical and public health importance.<sup>1,2</sup>

The San Francisco Department of Public Health recommends that sexually active HIV-infected gay men and other MSM get a syphilis test **with every routine CD4 T cell count or HIV viral load.**

Persons with newly reactive or a 4-fold increased titer should be treated for syphilis infection with at least one dose of benzathine penicillin G 2.4 million units IM injection. Penicillin allergic patients can be successfully treated with doxycycline 100 mg by mouth twice daily for 14 days.<sup>2,3</sup>

It is important to remind patients that since syphilis is a reportable disease, new cases may be contacted by the health department to assure timely treatment and to conduct a voluntary interview to elicit and notify recent sex partners or others at risk for infection.

#### FREE CONSULTATION

Syphilis can be difficult to diagnose and manage for the busy clinician. Please contact Drs. Joseph Engelman or Susan Philip at City Clinic (487-5595, [Joseph.Engelman@sfdph.org](mailto:Joseph.Engelman@sfdph.org); [Susan.Philip@sfdph.org](mailto:Susan.Philip@sfdph.org)) or myself (355-2000, [Jeff.Klausner@sfdph.org](mailto:Jeff.Klausner@sfdph.org)) for any questions or visit [www.sfcityclinic.org](http://www.sfcityclinic.org) and click on "For Providers."

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#### References:

1. Buchacz K, Patel P, Taylor M, et al. Syphilis increases HIV viral load and decreases CD4 cell counts in HIV-infected patients with new syphilis infections. *AIDS*. 2004 Oct 21;18(15):2075-9.
2. CDC. STD Treatment Guidelines, 2006.
3. Long CM, Klausner JD, Leon S, et al. Syphilis Treatment and HIV Infection in a Population-Based Study of Persons at High Risk for Sexually Transmitted Disease/HIV Infection in Lima, Peru. *Sex Transm Dis*. 2006 Mar;33(3):151-155.