



## Summary of Treating Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Crisis, New York City, 2020

- **Interim guidance for managing STIs during the COVID-19 pandemic aims to assure treatment for patients and their sex partners, while maintaining physical distancing and minimizing in-person health care contacts; guidance will be revisited as circumstances warrant.**
- **Treat STIs (and persons reporting contact to STIs) presumptively and same-day, via telemedicine (either video chat or a phone call); algorithms for managing common syndromes are attached.**
- **Use oral regimens to treat STIs whenever possible; injectable regimens remain the only treatment for people who are (or can become) pregnant and are infected with, or have been sexually exposed to, syphilis.**
- **Use expedited partner therapy (EPT) to treat the sex partners of patients you presumptively diagnose with chlamydia, gonorrhea or trichomonas infection.**

April 20, 2020

Dear Colleague,

To reduce possible COVID-19 transmission at medical and laboratory testing facilities by patients seeking care and treatment for STIs, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) recommends that providers interact with patients with STI symptoms (or exposure to an STI) remotely, via telemedicine (either video chat or a phone call) and, whenever possible, treat presumptively using oral antibiotic regimens, without diagnostic testing. We are promoting this approach to assure STI treatment remains available to patients in need. As the COVID-19 pandemic comes under better control, this guidance will be updated to reflect more routinely recognized standards of care. At the time of treatment, providers should advise follow-up STI testing to their patients, once it becomes safe and feasible to access routine medical services.

### **Treat STIs Presumptively.**

Use patient history, signs and symptoms to reach a presumptive diagnosis, and treat accordingly, *without laboratory testing*, so that treatment is same-day. This approach combines clinical experience and syndromic management (treating STI symptoms and signs based on the most common infectious etiologies for each syndrome, without seeking an etiology via laboratory testing). Guidance for the management of common syndromes are available at [nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/sti-syndromic-management-algorithm.pdf](https://nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/sti-syndromic-management-algorithm.pdf)

### **Use Oral Treatment Regimens.**

COVID-19 pandemic circumstances dictate that we minimize patients' presence in health care facilities. For that reason, oral regimens should be used to treat bacterial STI whenever possible (with the notable exception of syphilis among people who are, or can become, pregnant noted below).

Gonorrhea treatment regimens warrant special mention. The only gonorrhea treatment regimen recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) includes injection.<sup>1</sup> However, during the COVID-19 crisis in NYC, we are recommending oral gonorrhea treatment regimens be used (see [nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/presumptive-oral-gonorrhea-guidelines.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/presumptive-oral-gonorrhea-guidelines.pdf)). Oral treatment regimens for other STIs can be found in the two-page STI treatment summary available at [nycptc.org/x/STD\\_TreatmentTable\\_4\\_11\\_2017.pdf](https://www.nycptc.org/x/STD_TreatmentTable_4_11_2017.pdf), listed by presumptive diagnosis. Patients should be advised to seek remote consultation again if symptoms do not resolve as expected.

**EXCEPTION: Injectable penicillin is the only treatment for syphilis infection (or sexual exposure to syphilis) in people who are, or could become, pregnant, unless effective contraception can be assured.** Providers or patients requiring injectable syphilis treatment can contact the NYC Health Department's Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959 for instructions on obtaining benzathine penicillin injection at an NYC Health Department Sexual Health Clinic.

### **Submit prescriptions electronically.**

Prescribe electronically and consider using prescription fulfillment or pharmacy services that deliver medications directly to a patient-specified address.

### **Use expedited partner therapy (EPT) to treat the sex partner(s) of patients with a presumptive or laboratory-confirmed diagnosis of chlamydia, gonorrhea or trichomonas, as allowed.**

The practice of EPT is now legal for presumptively-diagnosed or laboratory-confirmed chlamydia, gonorrhea and trichomonas in New York State (NYS), including NYC.<sup>2</sup> Using EPT, a provider can prescribe or dispense medication to treat their patients' sex partner(s), without any interim evaluation of the sex partner(s). Prescribe partner treatment with oral regimens targeting the same infections presumptively diagnosed in the index patient, using single dose regimens (when possible), and taking into account pregnancy or lactation in the partner. EPT can be extended to sex partners (within the past 30 days) regardless of index patient's or partner's gender or sexual orientation.

*During the COVID-19 crisis, providers should prescribe EPT in the manner they judge most likely to result in treatment of the sex partner.* There is no limit on the number of sex partners for whom EPT can be provided. However, to maximize physical distancing, it would be practical to limit EPT doses to sex partners with whom the index patient is home-isolating or quarantining, and to advise the index patient to notify other partner(s) of the exposure. Sexually-exposed

partner(s) can call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959 to request presumptive treatment.

Providers giving EPT must direct patients to tell their partners to read the “Information for People Exposed to a Sexually Transmitted Infection” guidance ([nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/ept-partner-guidance.pdf](http://nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/ept-partner-guidance.pdf)) before taking the medication.

### Guidance on treating syphilis

- EPT for the sex partner(s) of patients with syphilis is **not currently permitted** in NYS; guidance will be updated as appropriate.
- Pregnant partners of a person with syphilis infection should be treated with benzathine penicillin G 2.4 million units intramuscularly.
- Partners who could become pregnant should receive benzathine penicillin G 2.4 million units intramuscularly unless an effective contraceptive method can be assured.
- Pregnant patients or their providers can call the NYC Health Department for clinical consultation at 347-396-7959 to arrange for benzathine penicillin treatment by the NYC Health Department, which has maintained the infrastructure needed to assure access to injectable STI treatment when absolutely necessary.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2015 CDC STD Treatment Guidelines.

<https://www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/default.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> The New York State Senate. New York State Public Health Law §2312.

<https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PBH/2312>.

