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GAVIN NEWSOM  
Governor

February 1, 2022

Dear Colleague:

On December 23, 2020, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) alerting health care providers of increasing reports of Disseminated Gonococcal Infection (DGI) cases in California during the second half of 2020. We have now recorded roughly double the number of DGI cases in 2020 compared to 2019, and DGI cases in 2021 exceeded the total number of cases in 2020 – including four deaths last year that were likely attributable to DGI. Most DGI cases in California have occurred among adults aged 30-50 years old (which is an age group not typically screened for gonorrhea) and disproportionately among Hispanic/Latinx individuals. In addition, approximately a fifth of cases have reported experiencing homelessness, more than a third report using one or more illicit drugs, and a third of total cases report using methamphetamine specifically. Of note, the majority of DGI cases to date did not present with urogenital symptoms.

Gonorrhea cases overall remained stable from 2019 to 2020, possibly due to COVID-19 causing a reduction in routine screening practices. Compared with the first half of 2019 (pre-pandemic), preliminary data from the first half of 2021 shows a 17% increase in gonorrhea cases. Additionally, based on 2019 enhanced surveillance data, we estimate that approximately 14 percent of people in California diagnosed with gonorrhea report any illicit drug use, with roughly 10 percent of total gonorrhea cases reporting methamphetamine use specifically.

Given this epidemiology and the increase in DGI across California, CDPH recommends the following for health care providers—including those in emergency departments, urgent care settings, and jails:

1. **For all sexually active individuals who use illicit drugs, especially methamphetamine, screen for gonorrhea at sites of potential exposure (urogenital, pharyngeal, and rectal).**
2. For sexually active patients who report any signs or symptoms consistent with DGI such as swelling and pain at a single joint, polyarthralgia, migratory arthralgias or rash consistent with DGI (diffuse erythematous-based papules, pustules, or vesicles), consider testing for gonorrhea at sites of potential exposure, as well as performing culture of blood and/or other sites of localized infection as indicated.

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3. For sexually active females <25 years of age, pregnant patients, men who have sex with men, individuals with HIV, and those at \*increased risk for infection, continue routine screening for gonorrhea and other sexually transmitted diseases (STD) per previous CDPH and U.S. [Centers for Disease Prevention and Control \(CDC\) recommendations](#).

For information on the management of DGI, please refer to the [2021 CDC Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STI\) Treatment Guidelines](#) and our previous DGI [Dear Colleague Letter](#).

Finally, health care providers should report all suspected, probable, or confirmed case of DGI to their local health department within one business day. Providers can use the [CDC DGI Case Reporting Form](#) to send the requested information to their local health department. Please reach out to your local health department for further questions on DGI and reporting requirements.

Sincerely,



**Kathleen Jacobson, MD**  
Chief, STD Control Branch  
California Department of Public Health

\*CDC and CDPH recommend screening individuals at increased risk for gonococcal infection such as those who have new or multiple sex partners, those who report inconsistent condom use and are not in mutually monogamous relationships, those with previous or coexisting sexually transmitted infections, and those who exchange sex for money or drugs. In addition, screening should occur for individuals with a sex partner that has a sexually transmitted infection or if there is a suspicion that a sex partner has concurrent partners.

**Resources:**

1. CDPH STD Control Branch DGI webpage. Available at: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Disseminated-Gonococcal-Infection.aspx>
2. CDPH Dear Colleague Letter for Clinicians – Increasing Reports of DGI in California (12/23/2020). Available at: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Dear-Colleague-Letter-for-Medical-Providers-Increasing-DGI-in-CA-12.23.20.pdf>.
3. CDPH DGI Frequently Asked Questions for Health Care Providers. Available at: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/DGI-FAQ.pdf>
4. California Prevention Training Center STD Expert Hour Webinar - DGI. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ew9vbLdwgbs>.
5. CDC DGI Case Reporting Form. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/program/outbreakresources/DGICaseReportingForm-508.pdf>
6. CDC 2021 STI Treatment Guidelines – Gonococcal Infections among Adults and Adolescents. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/gonorrhea-adults.htm>