



# Department of Health

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Syphilis is Back: PCDOH Urges Testing During STD Awareness Month and Afterwards**

BREWSTER, NY— Once nearly eliminated, syphilis has returned. In fact, in 2015 the highest numbers of syphilis cases were reported in the U.S. since 1995. Putnam County numbers have increased as well. In just one year, numbers in Putnam jumped from 8 to 18 cases—a dramatic rise of 125 percent from 2015 to 2016. The national numbers are so worrisome that a dedicated campaign entitled “Syphilis Strikes Back” was developed for STD Awareness Month in April by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The reason is to sound an alarm among health officials and the general public.

“Our Putnam numbers are disturbing,” said Interim Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, M.D. “After a historic low nationwide in 2001, this sexually transmitted disease has resurged. Unfortunately if untreated, it causes serious health problems. For newborns it can be fatal. Last year in a neighboring county, an infant with congenital syphilis which is passed from the mother, did not survive.”

Before 2013, syphilis rates were increasing mostly among men, particularly in men having sex with men. Then in 2013 to 2014, rates began increasing among women as well, which results in more cases of congenital syphilis in babies.

One challenge of syphilis is that it develops in stages with a variety of symptoms that can go unnoticed and clear up without treatment. During the initial stage, single or multiple painless sores develop at the site where syphilis enters the individual’s body. During this phase, the disease spreads by direct contact with a syphilis sore during any sexual activity

(vaginal, anal or oral sex). Second-stage symptoms may include a faint skin rash, internal sores, fever, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes, patchy hair loss, weight loss, muscle aches and tiredness.

These stages are followed by a latent period during which there are no signs or symptoms, but the disease continues and a person can potentially transmit the disease to a sexual partner for up to a year after the initial infection. Syphilis can also be spread during any stage from an infected mother to her unborn baby. The tertiary stage is the final and most serious phase, occurring 10 to 30 years after infection, which may result in organ damage and death.

The good news is syphilis is curable, with the right antibiotics. The only way to know if someone is infected is to have a blood test, which is now being recommended more widely by Putnam County Department of Health officials and others. In addition to testing and diagnosis, treatment and follow-up care in patients and their partners is of utmost importance.

Primary care providers can order the test and prescribe the right treatment. For those who are under- or uninsured, Putnam County's federally qualified health center Open Door provides these services free, or on a sliding scale. The office is located at 155 Main Street in Brewster. Their phone number is 845-279-6999. For questions about prevention, symptoms or transmission, contact the communicable disease nurse at the health department at 808-1390.

The Department of Health's mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit the PCDOH website at [www.putnamcountyny.com/health](http://www.putnamcountyny.com/health) or visit the social media sites on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/putnamhealth](http://www.facebook.com/putnamhealth), and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

