



## Louisiana Health Alert Message 23-10: Penicillin G Benzathine (Bicillin L-A®) Shortage

**Origination Date:**

June 14, 2023

**Revision Dates (List All Revision Dates):**

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#### Summary

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently announced a nationwide shortage of penicillin G benzathine (Bicillin L-A) which is a first-line recommended treatment for syphilis. The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) is aware of in-state providers experiencing challenges obtaining Bicillin L-A and is working closely with federal partners to monitor and mitigate the impacts of this shortage to the extent possible.

#### What should providers do during the Bicillin L-A shortage?

- When treating conditions other than syphilis such as **streptococcal pharyngitis/tonsillitis** and **rheumatic fever prophylaxis**, conserve Bicillin L-A by using other drugs such as penicillin V, amoxicillin, or azithromycin.
- Prioritize the use of Bicillin L-A for treatment of **pregnant women with syphilis** or exposure to syphilis.
  1. This is the only treatment recommended for pregnant women that has been proven to prevent congenital syphilis.
  2. Pregnant women who are allergic to penicillin should be referred for desensitization and treatment per the 2021 CDC STI Treatment Guidelines. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/default.htm>
- Do NOT substitute Bicillin L-A with Bicillin C-R.
- For **congenital, ocular, and neurosyphilis** – treat with intravenous aqueous penicillin G as per 2021 CDC STI Treatment Guidelines <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/default.htm>
- For **tertiary syphilis with normal CSF exam**, treat with Bicillin L-A according to the 2021 CDC STI Treatment Guidelines. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/default.htm>
- For **primary, secondary, early latent, or late latent syphilis** during this drug shortage, consider substituting treatment of non-pregnant individuals with appropriate alternative treatment:
  3. **Primary, secondary, or early latent syphilis**, treat with doxycycline 100 mg orally BID for 2 weeks.
  4. **Late latent or syphilis of unknown duration**, treat with doxycycline 100 mg orally BID for 4 weeks.
- Consider prescribing **doxycycline as post exposure prophylaxis (DOXY PEP)** to prevent syphilis infections among appropriate patients living with HIV and patients who are currently taking HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (HIV PrEP). A single 200mg dose of Doxycycline taken within 72 hours of possible exposure demonstrates significant reductions in syphilis, gonorrhea,

and chlamydia infections in these populations<sup>1, 2</sup>. More information about DOXY PEP can be found here:

- <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-funded-study-finds-doxycycline-reduces-sexually-transmitted-infections-two-thirds>
- <https://aidsetc.org/blog/doxypep-doxycycline-sti-prevention>

See the CDC Bicillin Shortage Announcement for additional clinical information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/syphilis.htm>

#### What should providers do if they experience shortages of Bicillin L-A?

- Notify OPH Pharmacist Leah Michael at (Leah.Michael@LA.GOV) and the CDC STD Division at (stdshortages@cdc.gov) of any shortage or low inventories of Bicillin L-A in your facility.
- Request Bicillin allocation prioritization to the Pfizer Supply Continuity Team at 844-646-4398 (select 1 and then select 3).
- **If treatment with Bicillin L-A is needed for your patient and there are no clinically acceptable alternative treatments**, call your LDH/OPH Regional Office or Parish Health Unit (PHU) to schedule an appointment for treatment at the nearest PHU. ([LDH PHU Directory](#))
  - If you are unable to reach your Parish Health Unit (PHU) by phone or are unable to obtain a timely appointment, please email [LAParishHealthUnits@la.gov](mailto:LAParishHealthUnits@la.gov) for assistance and include detailed contact information. For further assistance, clinicians may call the ID-Epi Clinician Hotline at 800-256-2748.

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<sup>1</sup> Luetkemeyer, A. F., et al. (2023). Post-exposure Doxycycline to Prevent Bacterial Sexually Transmitted Infections, *New England Journal of Medicine*, April 6, 2023; 388:1296-1306.

<sup>2</sup> Venkatesan, P. (2022). Doxycycline PEP for prevention of STIs. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, 22(11), 1545.