



**BARBARA FERRER, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed.**  
Director

**MUNTU DAVIS, M.D., M.P.H.**  
County Health Officer

**JEFFREY D. GUNZENHAUSER, M.D., M.P.H.**  
Director, Disease Control Bureau

**MARIO J. PÉREZ, M.P.H.**  
Director, Division of HIV and STD Programs

600 South Commonwealth Avenue, 10th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90005  
TEL (213) 351-8001 • FAX (213) 387-0912

[www.publichealth.lacounty.gov](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov)

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October 9, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

On October 8, 2019, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released its 2018 Annual STD Surveillance Report (<https://www.cdc.gov/std/>) which highlighted continued increases in syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia in 2018. Based on these new data the CDC will be focusing on four key messages:

1. CDC's "State of the Union" on STDs stresses that we must stop syphilis – too many babies are needlessly dying - *Every case is one too many when we have the tools to prevent it.*
2. Addressing the rising rates of female syphilis is critical to preventing congenital syphilis.
3. Protect Moms = Protect Babies - *To prevent congenital syphilis, it is critical to increase prenatal testing and treatment.*
4. STDs have surged for the fifth consecutive year, reaching an all-time high.

The Los Angeles County's (LAC's) Division of HIV and STD Programs (DHSP) has prepared a 2018 STD snapshot highlighting key findings from STD surveillance case data reported through 2018. Similar to CDC's 2018 STD report, LAC showed ongoing increases in syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia cases in 2018, with congenital syphilis cases reported at 54 cases, reflecting a 23% relative increase since 2017.

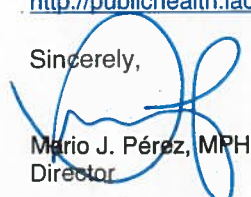
Barriers in health equity, including poverty, homelessness, stigma and discrimination, health literacy, and access to culturally appropriate sex-positive health services are contributing to LAC's increasing STD burden. Additionally, methamphetamine use, which is associated with sexual behaviors that increase risk for STDs, may be a driving factor in LAC's STD epidemic. Strengthening integrated services between STD treatment and control and substance abuse disorder services is needed to reduce both STD cases and methamphetamine use in LAC.

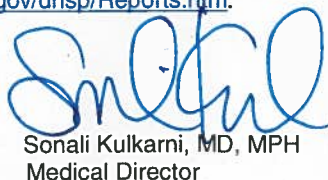
LAC Public Health has identified four priorities that underscore the importance of strengthened policy efforts and intensified screening, treatment, and STD awareness, particularly for at-risk populations.

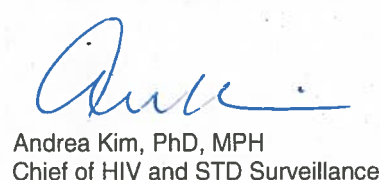
1. Improve early detection of cases through testing of at-risk populations.
2. Interrupt disease transmission through the appropriate treatment of cases and their partners.
3. Educate consumers and community to raise awareness of STDs.
4. Create effective policies to impact health care provider behavior.

For your reference, LAC's 2018 STD snapshot is attached and can be accessed on the DHSP website at: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/Reports.htm>.

Sincerely,

  
Mario J. Pérez, MPH  
Director

  
Sonali Kulkarni, MD, MPH  
Medical Director

  
Andrea Kim, PhD, MPH  
Chief of HIV and STD Surveillance

c: Jeffrey Gunzenhauser, MD, MPH

# Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Los Angeles County, 2018<sup>1</sup>

(excludes Long Beach and Pasadena)

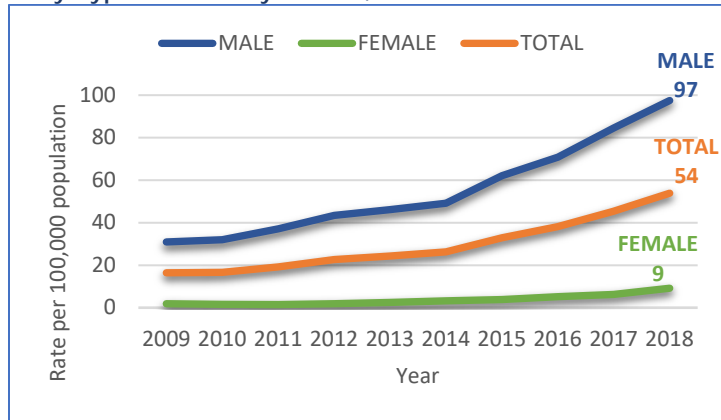
Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) continue to rise in Los Angeles County (LAC). In 2018, there were a total of 96,342 cases of STDs reported to the LAC Department of Public Health. The majority of reported cases (66%) were chlamydia followed by gonorrhea (26%) and syphilis (8%). Sixty-six percent of the syphilis cases were early syphilis.<sup>2</sup> Data do not include Long Beach and Pasadena due to reporting delays.

## Early Syphilis

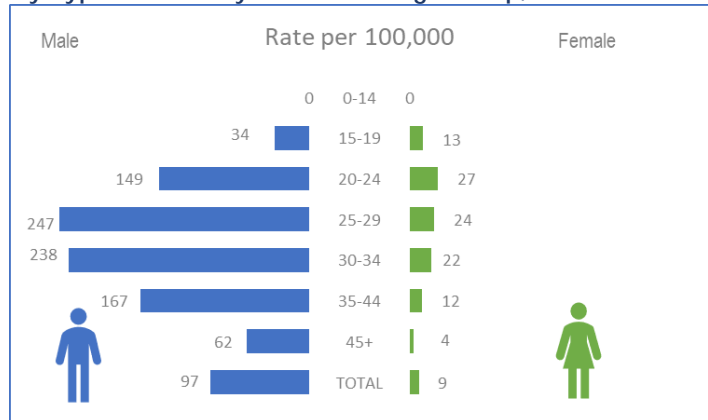
*Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacteria, *Treponema pallidum* and is a known risk factor for HIV. While it is the least prevalent of the reportable STDs, if untreated, it can cause significant health issues including damage to the brain, nerves, eyes, or heart. Early syphilis includes the infectious stages of syphilis infection.*

In 2018, 5,200 early syphilis cases were reported to LAC with a rate of 54 per 100,000 and a rate increase of 20% since 2017. In 2018, early syphilis among males occurred at 10.8 times the rate as that of females; however, from 2017 to 2018, there was a lower relative increase in early syphilis rates among males (14%) compared to females (50%). Among males, rates were highest among persons aged 25-29 years compared to females where rates were highest among persons aged 20-24 years. By race, rates were highest among Pacific Islanders (162 per 100,000) and African Americans (113 per 100,000).

Early Syphilis Rates by Gender, 2009-2018



Early Syphilis Rates by Gender and Age Group, 2018

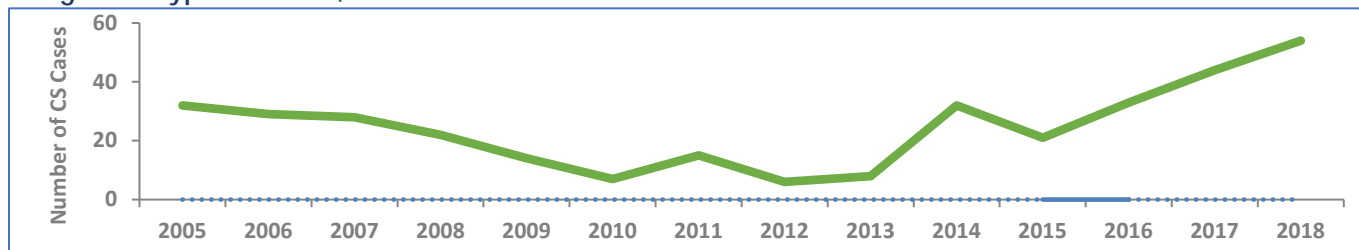


## Congenital Syphilis

*Congenital syphilis is a multi-system infection caused by the bacteria, *Treponema pallidum*, in a fetus or infant, passed during pregnancy. It can cause preterm birth, miscarriage or stillbirth. It can also lead to serious birth defects.*

In 2018, LAC had the highest number of congenital syphilis cases (N=54) ever reported and an increase of 23% since 2017. Since 2010, the number of reported congenital syphilis cases has increased 671%. Hispanic (62%) and African American (32%) females represented the majority of mothers of infants with congenital syphilis.

Congenital Syphilis Cases, 2005-2018



<sup>1</sup> Data are provisional and subject to change due to reporting delays. Data do not include Long Beach and Pasadena. This document will be updated to include these jurisdictions when data become available.

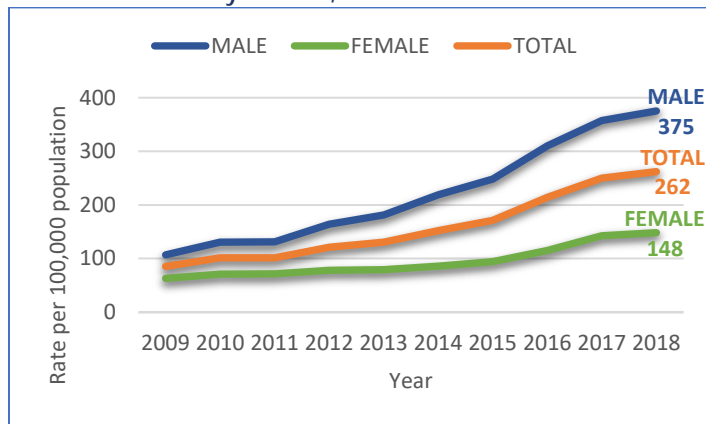
<sup>2</sup> Early syphilis includes all cases staged as primary, secondary, or early non-primary, non-secondary (previously early latent).

## Gonorrhea

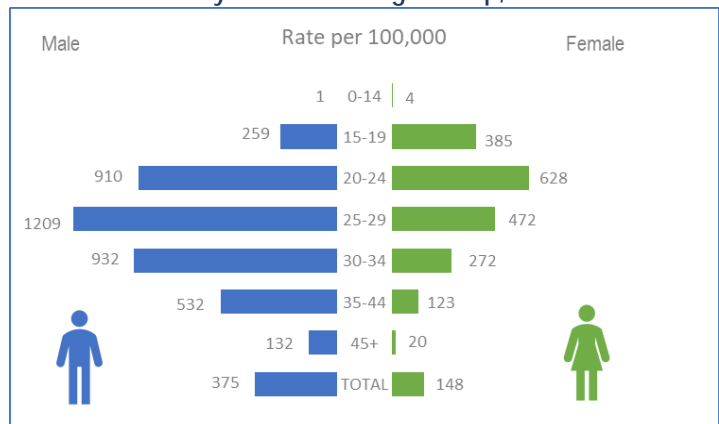
*Gonorrhea is one of the most common reported sexually transmitted infections. It can cause infection in the genitals, rectum, and throat. If untreated, gonorrhea can cause serious health problems including infertility for men and women. It may also increase the chances of getting HIV. Though gonorrhea is treatable, it has progressively developed resistance to the antibiotic drugs prescribed for treatment.*

In 2018, 25,311 gonorrhea cases were reported to LAC with a rate of 262 per 100,000 and a rate increase of 5% since 2017. Among males, gonorrhea rates were 2.5 times higher than among females in 2018. Male gonorrhea rates increased 5% and female rates increased 4% since 2017 with rates highest among males 25-29 years and females 20-24 years. By race, African Americans had rates (672 per 100,000) 3.8 times higher than Whites (176 per 100,000).

Gonorrhea Rates by Gender, 2009-2018



Gonorrhea Rates by Gender and Age Group, 2018

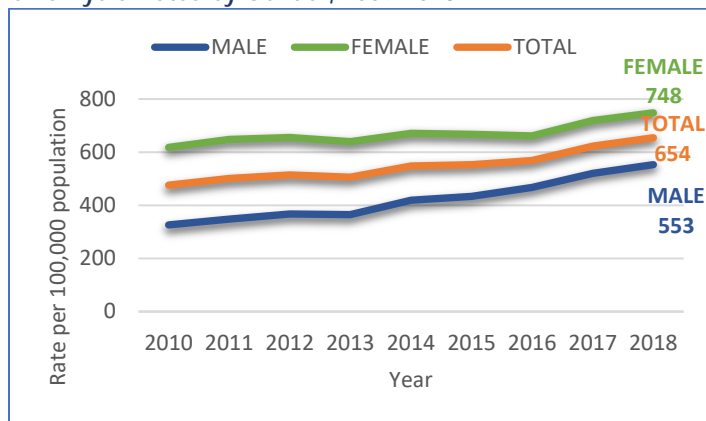


## Chlamydia

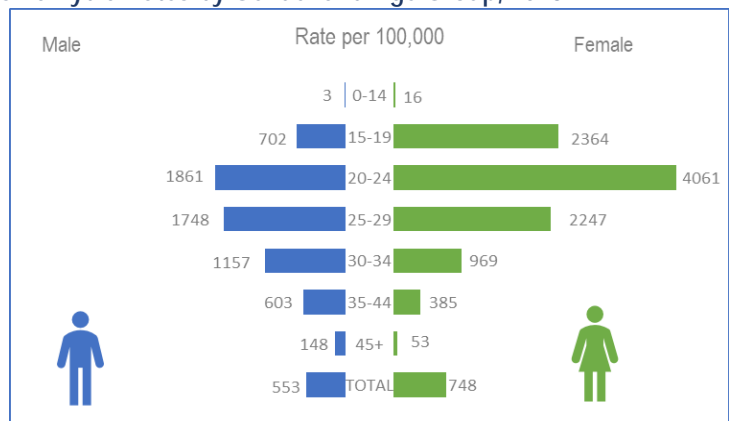
*Chlamydia is the most common reported sexually transmitted infection and can be transmitted via vaginal, rectal or oral sex. If untreated, it can cause infertility in women.*

In 2018, 63,142 chlamydia cases were reported to LAC with a rate of 654 per 100,000 and a rate increase of 5% since 2017. Rates among males increased 6% while females increased 4% since 2017. Chlamydia was most prevalent among youth 15-29 years old. By race, African Americans had rates (985 per 100,000) 4.8 times higher than Whites (207 per 100,000).

Chlamydia Rates by Gender, 2009-2018



Chlamydia Rates by Gender and Age Group, 2018



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<sup>2</sup> Early syphilis includes all cases staged as primary, secondary, or early non-primary, non-secondary (previously early latent).