

# Penicillin G Benzathine (Bicillin<sup>®</sup> L-A) For Treatment of Syphilis

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**Long-acting penicillin G benzathine (Bicillin<sup>®</sup> L-A)** is the preferred antibiotic treatment for syphilis. Each dose requires two intramuscular injections, one injection into each hip (preferred site) or buttock muscle at the same visit.

**One dose of Bicillin<sup>®</sup> L-A 2.4 million units** is usually adequate to treat infectious syphilis. However, if the infection has been present for more than one year, or for an unknown length of time, then three doses of Bicillin<sup>®</sup> L-A 2.4 million units are needed; these injections are given once a week over three weeks.

## Allergies

- Tell your healthcare provider if you have allergies to penicillins or cephalosporins:
  - e.g. penicillin V-K and amoxicillin (Amoxil<sup>®</sup>)
  - e.g. cefixime (Suprax<sup>®</sup>), cephalexin (Keflex<sup>®</sup>), cefaclor (Ceclor<sup>®</sup>)

## Pregnancy and Chest/Breastfeeding

- Please consult your healthcare provider if you are chest/breastfeeding.
- If you are diagnosed with syphilis while you are pregnant or chest/breastfeeding, it is very important that you receive treatment.
- If you are being treated for syphilis in the second half of your pregnancy, please discuss special considerations with your healthcare provider.

## Caution

- **Drug Interactions:** Please note that individual drug interactions are no longer listed in this document. If you are taking any prescription, non-prescription, herbal, or recreational products, please discuss with your healthcare provider.

## Care of Yourself After Treatment

- You will be asked to wait in the clinic for 15 minutes after your Bicillin<sup>®</sup> L-A injections.
- If you have any reactions after treatment (e.g. rash, itchiness, or breathing difficulties), please inform a staff member immediately.

- If these symptoms occur after leaving the clinic, please seek emergency care immediately (call 9-1-1 or go to a hospital or urgent care centre).

## Side Effects

- You may get mild, temporary pain at the injection site.
- You may have diarrhea after treatment.
- Some may get a **Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction**: fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, or fatigue.
  - A Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction is a set of temporary side effects that may occur a few hours after treatment of syphilis. Not everyone will have this reaction.
  - Do not be alarmed, this is **not an allergic response** and usually ends in 24 hours.
  - Take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®), if needed to help relieve symptoms.
- If these effects don't go away or get worse, please contact your healthcare provider.

## Stages of Syphilis

- Treatment and follow-up recommendations are based on how long the syphilis infection has been present in your body. Your healthcare provider will inform you of what stage of syphilis you have, and what treatment is required. You may also receive a call from a nurse on behalf of Public Health to discuss partner follow-up and recommendations for follow-up testing (see table on next page).

If you have any questions or need more information, please visit [www.smartsexresource.com](http://www.smartsexresource.com) or contact your healthcare provider.

## SYPHILIS: WHAT TO KNOW

| <b>INFECTIOUS SYPHILIS</b><br><b>(Primary, Secondary, Early Latent)</b>   | <b>LATENT SYPHILIS OF UNKNOWN DURATION</b><br><b>(LSUD)* and LATE LATENT SYPHILIS</b>   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have symptoms such as a sore or rash on your genitals or mouth.</li> <li>• May not have any symptoms but can still spread.</li> <li>• Duration of infection: less than one year.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Hidden” infection; no symptoms and likely does not spread* but can cause damage to your body if not treated.</li> <li>• Duration of infection: more than one year or of unknown duration.</li> </ul> <p><i>*because the duration of infection for LSUD is unknown, it may or may not be transmissible</i></p>   |
| <b>Treatment</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicillin® L-A 2.4 million units intramuscularly x 1 dose.</li> <li>• Given in divided doses of 1.2 million units by injection into each hip (preferred site) or buttock muscle at the same visit.</li> <li>• If you have symptoms of syphilis such as a sore or rash, these should disappear within 2-4 weeks.</li> <li>• If the symptoms have not resolved within this time, see your healthcare provider.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicillin® L-A 2.4 million units intramuscularly x 3 sets of injections; given weekly (7 days apart) for 3 weeks.</li> <li>• Given in divided doses of 1.2 million units by injection into each hip (preferred site) or buttock muscle at the same visit.</li> <li>• Complete treatment = 7.2 million units over three weeks.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Partner Notification and Follow-Up</b>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All sexual contacts in the last 3 months before your diagnosis or symptom onset should get tested for syphilis and get treated for a possible syphilis infection.</li> <li>• Sexual contacts from more than 3 months before your diagnosis or symptom onset may also need to be tested.</li> </ul>   | <p><b>LATENT SYPHILIS OF UNKNOWN DURATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All sexual contacts in the last 3 months before your diagnosis should get tested for syphilis and get treated for a possible syphilis infection.</li> <li>• Sexual contacts between 3 months and 1 year prior to your diagnosis only need to get a syphilis test, or as per the BCCDC Syphilis Team recommendation.</li> </ul> |

| <b>INFECTIOUS SYPHILIS<br/>(Primary, Secondary, Early Latent)</b>  | <b>LATENT SYPHILIS OF UNKNOWN DURATION<br/>(LSUD)* and LATE LATENT SYPHILIS</b>   |
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| <b>Partner Notification and Follow-Up (continued)</b>  |   |
|  | <p><b>LATE LATENT SYPHILIS</b></p> <p>The following are recommended to get a syphilis test only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All long-term sexual contacts.</li> <li>• Children whose gestational parent has a late latent syphilis diagnosis.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Special Instructions</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not have sex until 1 week (i.e.,7 days) after your treatment.</li> <li>• Tell your health care provider if you have sex with a partner who has not been treated when they should have been.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not have sex until 1 week (i.e.7 days) after starting your treatment.</li> <li>• It is very important to complete the entire three weeks of treatment to treat the infection and prevent complications.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Follow-up Blood Tests</b>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations for follow-up testing will be discussed by your healthcare provider.</li> <li>• For most people, this will mean repeat syphilis testing every 3-6 months for 2 years.</li> <li>• Note: Your syphilis EIA screening test will usually remain positive (reactive) for life, even after treatment. Each time you get tested, a second test will be done by the lab to determine if you have a new infection or require additional treatment.</li> <li>• Your healthcare provider will advise you on the recommendations at that time.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations for follow-up testing will be discussed by your healthcare provider.</li> <li>• For most people, this will mean repeat syphilis testing every 3-6 months for 2 years.</li> <li>• Note: your syphilis EIA screening test will usually remain positive (reactive) for life, even after treatment. Additional blood tests will be done to ensure the infection is fully treated.</li> </ul> |