

Syphilis Cases in Champaign County

General Syphilis Information

Background

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum* and can cause serious health problems without treatment. Infection develops in stages (primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary). Each stage can have different signs and symptoms.

Transmission & Risk

Syphilis is transmitted from person-to-person by direct contact with syphilis sores. Sores occur mainly on the external genitals, vagina, anus, or in the rectum. Sores also can occur on the lips and in the mouth. Syphilis can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sexual contact.

Pregnant women with the disease can pass it to their unborn children. Babies born with syphilis can have many health problems. This may lead to low birth weight, premature delivery, or even having a stillbirth (a baby born dead). To protect their babies, pregnant women should be tested for syphilis regularly during the pregnancy and at delivery and receive immediate treatment, if positive. An infected baby may be born without signs or symptoms of disease. However, if not treated immediately, the baby may develop serious problems within a few weeks. Untreated babies can have many health problems (such as cataracts, deafness, or seizures), and they can die.

The average time between infection with syphilis and appearance of the first symptom is 21 days, but it can range from ten to 90 days.

Symptoms & Complications

Primary Stage

The appearance of a single sore marks the first (primary) stage of syphilis symptoms, but there may be multiple sores. The sore appears at the location where syphilis entered the body. The sore is usually firm, round, and painless. Because the sore is painless, it can easily go unnoticed. The sore lasts three to six weeks and heals regardless of whether a person is treated. However, if the infected person does not receive adequate treatment the infection progresses to the secondary stage.

Secondary Stage

Skin rashes and/or sores in the mouth, vagina, or anus (also called mucous membrane lesions) mark the secondary stage of symptoms. This stage usually starts with a rash on one or more areas of the body. Rashes associated with secondary syphilis can appear from the time when the primary sore is healing to several weeks after the sore has healed. The rash usually does not cause itching. This rash may appear as rough, red, or reddish-brown spots both on the palms of the hands and/or the bottoms of the feet. However, this rash may look different on other parts of the body and can look like rashes caused by other diseases.

Large, raised, gray or white lesions may develop in warm, moist areas such as the mouth, underarm, or groin region. Sometimes rashes associated with secondary syphilis are so faint that they are not noticed. Other symptoms of secondary syphilis include fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches, and fatigue. The symptoms of secondary syphilis will go away

with or without treatment. Without appropriate treatment, the infection will progress to the early non-primary non-secondary and unknown duration or late stages of disease.

Early Non-Primary Non-Secondary and Unknown Duration or Late Stages

The early non-primary non-secondary stage of syphilis begins when primary and secondary symptoms disappear. Without treatment, the infected person can continue to have syphilis in their body even though there are no signs or symptoms. This stage can last for years. About 15% of people who have not been treated for syphilis develop late stage syphilis, which can appear 10–30 years after infection began. Symptoms of the late stage of syphilis include difficulty coordinating muscle movements, paralysis, numbness, gradual blindness, and dementia. In the late stages of syphilis, the disease damages the internal organs, including the brain, nerves, eyes, heart, blood vessels, liver, bones, and joints. This damage can result in death.

Testing, Diagnosis, Treatment

A blood test is the most common way to determine if someone has syphilis. Shortly after infection, the body produces syphilis antibodies that can be detected by an accurate, safe, and inexpensive blood test.

Some healthcare providers can diagnose syphilis by examining material from a syphilis sore using a special microscope called a dark-field microscope. If syphilis bacteria are present in the sore, they will show up when observed through the microscope.

No home remedies or over-the-counter drugs will cure syphilis, but syphilis is simple to cure with appropriate antibiotics from a physician. Treatment will kill the syphilis bacterium and prevent further damage, but it will not repair damage already done.

Persons treated for syphilis must abstain from sexual contact with new partners until the syphilis sores are completely healed. Persons with syphilis must notify their sex partners so that they also can be tested and treated if necessary.

More information can be found here: <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/infectious-disease-control-manual/section3/section-3-syphilis>

Champaign County Related Discussion

Figure 1 shows the syphilis cases in Champaign County from 2017 to 2021. All cases during this period are classified as confirmed or probable. The cases include all the stages of syphilis. From 2017 to 2020 there is a 125.0% increase in cases, while the overall 5-year period (2017-2021) shows a 50.0% increase. Overall, the trend of syphilis cases is trending upwards.

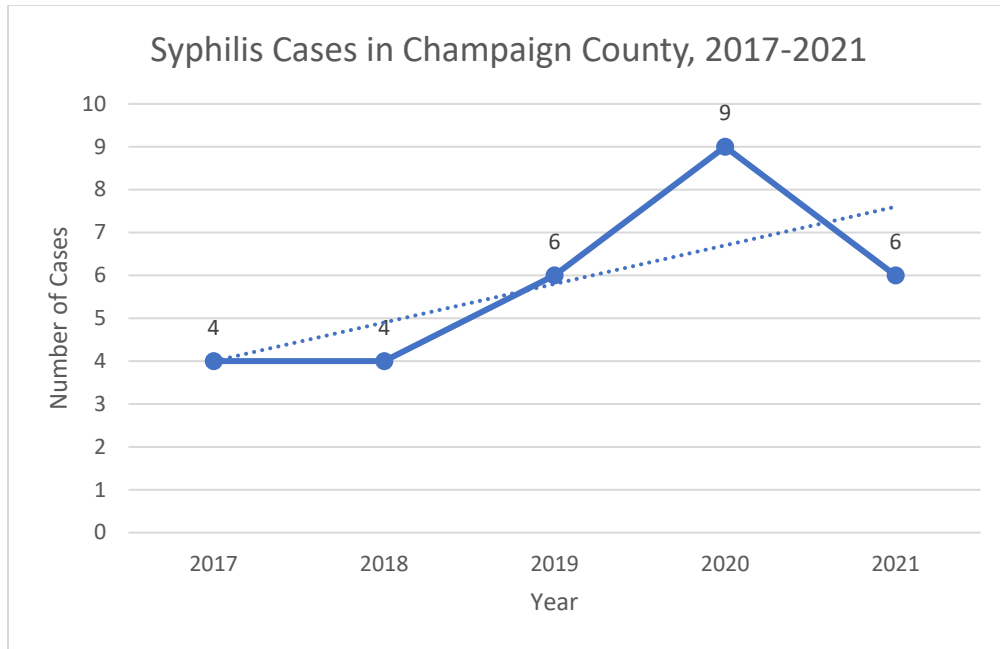


Figure 1 Syphilis Cases in Champaign County, 2017-2021.

Figure 2 shows the Syphilis cases from 2017-2021 broken up by age group and sex. Overall, the majority (41.38%) of all cases fall within the 20-29 age group. The highest number of cases for both males (31.25%) and females (53.85%) fall within the 20-29 year old age group. The second highest for males (25.00%) falls within the 30-39 year old age group and the 40-49 year old age group. The second highest for females (30.77%) falls within the 30-39 year old age group.

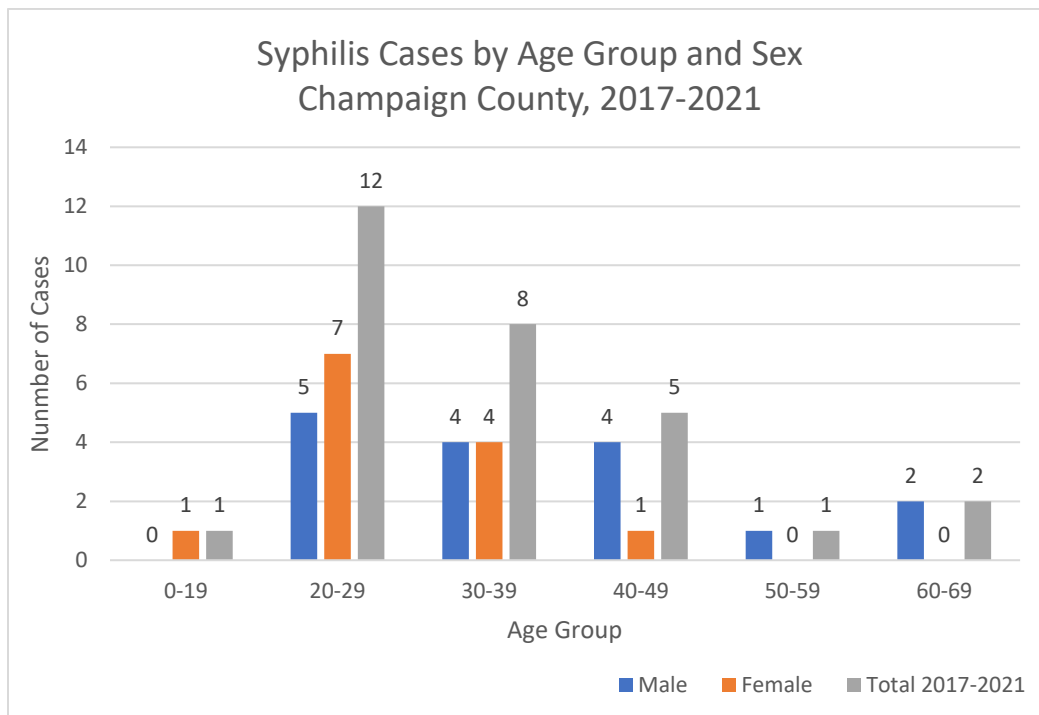


Figure 2 Syphilis Cases by Age Group and Sex, Champaign County, 2017-2021.