



National Association of County & City Health Officials

*The National Connection for Local Public Health*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **New CDC Report Shows Sexually Transmitted Infection Rates Rapidly Increased Again in 2018**

*— Local partnerships and national action needed to address alarming return of Congenital Syphilis —*

**Washington, DC, October 8, 2019** — Today, the [National Association of County and City Health Officials](#) (NACCHO), representing the nation's nearly 3,000 local governmental health departments, released the following statements in reaction to newly released statistics on the spread of sexually transmitted diseases from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Their [Sexually Transmitted Disease \(STD\) Surveillance Report, 2018](#) highlights that the rates of syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhea have surged for the fifth year.

Especially alarming is the 40% increase in congenital syphilis in just one year, with a jump from 918 cases in 2017 to 1,306 in 2018. Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can have serious consequences for adults and babies if left untreated, but is simple to cure, including in utero, with the right treatment. However, without early and regular prenatal care, cases of syphilis in pregnant people often go undetected. Congenital syphilis increases are widespread, with 41 states and Washington, D.C., reporting at least one case of congenital syphilis in 2018. As well, there are portions of the country which are disproportionately burdened.

NACCHO's Board President, George T. Roberts, of the Northeast Texas Public Health District, is from one of those disproportionately burdened states. In 2018, Texas had one of the highest rates of congenital syphilis in the country. "This new report makes it very clear that as a nation, we need to do more to address the spread of STDs. But it also highlights the work that needs to be done at the local level to turn the tide on these issues. Right here in Texas—where we have one of the highest rates of congenital syphilis in the country—we have our marching orders. Congenital syphilis is completely preventable, but the cases keep coming. It will take the work of public health and many community partners to reduce stigma, increase testing, ensure access to treatment, and prevent future cases."

"Reversing these STD trends, especially congenital syphilis, will require health departments, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders to work together to more effectively implement proven prevention strategies and develop new tools and approaches to address what isn't working," said NACCHO CEO, Lori Tremmel Freeman. "For local health departments, this means educating providers and the public about the increasing risk of syphilis, including congenital syphilis, and the need for early prenatal care to properly treat fetuses with congenital syphilis. But we know that these STD crises will not resolve by themselves. We must focus on reducing all barriers to individuals seeking healthcare, such as poverty, stigma, and lack of health insurance. These barriers increase the risk for contracting an STD and make it more difficult to seek testing and treatment."

NACCHO has worked closely with the CDC to support its local health department members in actively working to mitigate rising STD rates, including by supporting localities to set-up [STI Express Clinics](#), developing tools to support the utilization of CDC's forthcoming *Recommendations for Providing Quality STD Clinical Services*, identifying and evaluating models for connecting STI clinic patients to substance use disorder treatment and other behavioral health services, as well as a new project to look at innovative upstream congenital syphilis interventions. In addition, local health departments across the country are actively using evidence-based strategies to increase identification of STDs; assuring appropriate clinical services for STD clients and their sexual partners; conducting health education and promotion; using surveillance data to inform programmatic efforts

and focus on populations disproportionately impacted by STDs; and educating the public, providers, and key stakeholders on effective policy approaches.

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**About NACCHO**

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) represents the nation's nearly 3,000 local governmental health departments. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote health and well-being for all people in their communities. For more information about NACCHO, please visit [www.naccho.org](http://www.naccho.org).