GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H., **Commissioner** / Brian Kemp, **Governor**

200 Piedmont Avenue, SE
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

dph.ga.gov

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Dear Colleague:

Georgia's congenital syphilis rate is at its highest level since record-keeping began in 1998. The rate has increased every year since 2016. Congenital syphilis is preventable. It is my firm belief that each case is one too many when adequate prenatal care, syphilis testing, and early treatment can save lives.

The Georgia General Assembly passed Senate Bill 46 in 2023. The legislation revised STD testing requirements for pregnant women by requiring healthcare providers who care for a woman during pregnancy to perform HIV and syphilis testing at the first prenatal visit, 28-32 weeks gestation, **and most importantly for hospital providers, at the time of delivery.**

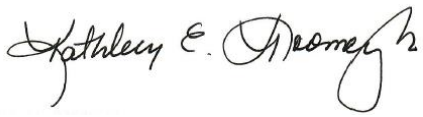
Syphilis treatment (benzathine penicillin G only) initiated at least 30 days before birth has proven effective at decreasing the chances that a baby is born with congenital syphilis. Treatment for HIV should be initiated immediately. HIV antiretroviral therapy during pregnancy, **at the time of delivery, and prophylaxis to the newborn** dramatically reduces perinatal transmission of HIV.

In addition to the requirements under Senate Bill 46, Georgia law also requires all Georgia physicians, laboratories, and other healthcare providers to report patients with syphilis infections to the Georgia Department of Public Health (Georgia Code OCGA §31-12-2). Both laboratory-confirmed and clinical diagnoses are reportable within the specified time intervals.

As commissioner and as a physician, I urge you to test pregnant women for syphilis and HIV at delivery as part of your delivery routine – not just because it is the law, but for the health and well-being of every mother and infant in Georgia. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact your district health office or call the Georgia Department of Public Health at 1-866-PUB-HLTH (1-866-782-4584).

Thank you for all you do to help protect the lives of all Georgians.

Sincerely,



Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner and State Health Officer