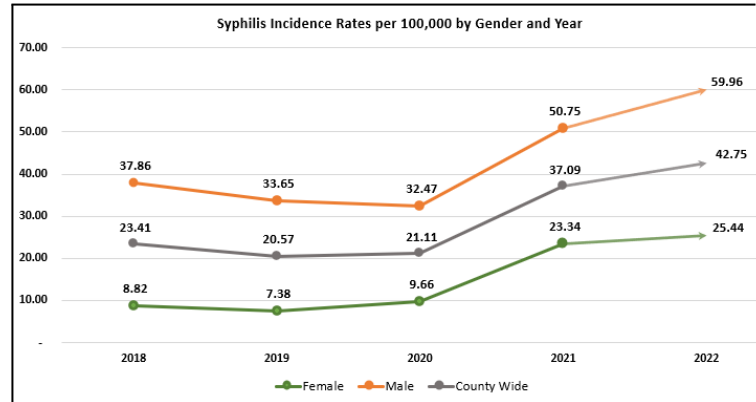


County of Santa Cruz Public Health 2022 Syphilis Report



Situation Background

- Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that develops in stages, primary, secondary, latent and tertiary, all varying in severity. Early syphilis used in this report consists of primary, secondary, and early latent stages.
- People who may become pregnant are especially vulnerable as they may pass on **congenital syphilis (CS)** to the infant, leading to infant death or severe brain damage.
- Historically, most of Santa Cruz County’s early syphilis cases have been seen in those identifying as men who have sex with men (MSM) and in men aged 30–39.
 - Across California and in Santa Cruz County, there is a **steady increase** in early syphilis cases who identify as female.
- In 2022, there were **117 early syphilis** cases in Santa Cruz County. Compared to 2021, there were 103 early syphilis cases.



Early Syphilis Cases from 2018– 2022 in Santa Cruz County

Disease Impact

Of the **117 early syphilis cases** identified in Santa Cruz County in 2022:



21% report unstable housing or are experiencing homelessness



33% report injection drug or methamphetamine use



17% report past or current incarceration

Santa Cruz County is home to nearly 270,000 people. Approximately 33% of Santa Cruz County adult residents (18+) are enrolled in Medi-Cal and 45% of all births are to people enrolled in Medi-Cal. In 2022, there were over 2,200 actively homeless adults.

➤ Education, Testing, and Treatment

Many people infected with syphilis are unaware and are even symptom free. In the meantime, asymptomatic people infect others through sex. Syphilis is diagnosed with a blood test and is easily treated with antibiotic injections. Santa Cruz County is addressing the **social and environmental factors** that lead to disease transmission through Education, Testing and Treatment (ETT):

Education

Educate on individual behavior and interactions with other people, while also supporting systems to provide early disease detection and supportive services.

Testing

All individuals who report methamphetamine use, pregnant people (twice during pregnancy) or people experiencing homelessness should be tested.

Treatment

Supportive treatment includes: provide access to resources, treat clinically suspected or diagnosed syphilis immediately, and refer sex partners for testing and treatment.

➤ Call to Action

Public Health is calling for **STI Liaisons** from healthcare and community-focused organizations to make a lasting impact against syphilis. STI Liaisons will work with Public Health to:

- Ensure **all** healthcare providers have the resources to the right testing, diagnosis, and treatment to ensure timely detection and care.
- Assess the gaps in intervention across the education, testing, and treatment focus areas; develop solutions to assessed gaps. Identify methods to support individuals who are high risk for early syphilis, via education and testing.

