



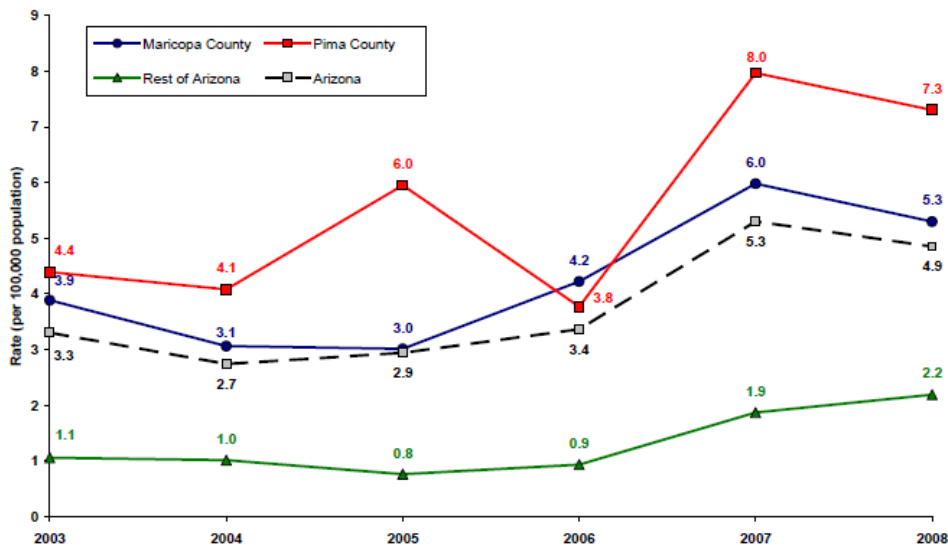
PIMA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
Clinical & Outreach Services • HIV/STD PROGRAM
332 S. Freeway • Tucson, Arizona 85745
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February 17, 2010

Dear Healthcare Provider:

I am writing today to highlight an ongoing and increasing problem of great public health significance, and that is, our rates of both infectious and congenital syphilis. Arizona has been in a syphilis outbreak since 2001, and it has not shown signs of abating. Unfortunately, we have had a corresponding increase in congenital syphilis cases. Arizona was #1 for rates of congenital syphilis in the nation from 2003-2005, and we remain one of the most highly impacted states in the nation. In an effort to reverse the elevated rates of congenital syphilis cases in Pima County, the Pima County Health Department is offering assistance to all providers to identify and treat cases of syphilis, especially in women.

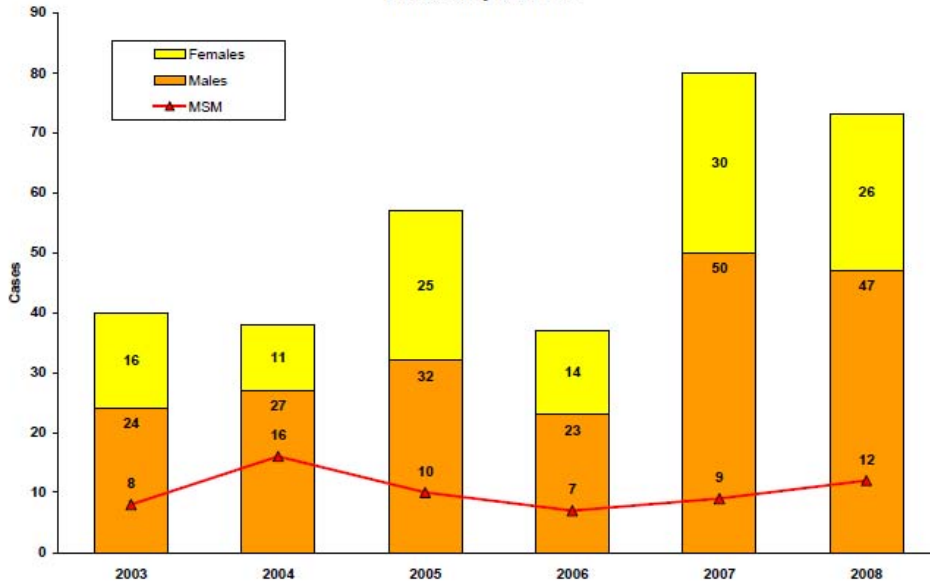
Figure 2. Reported Primary and Secondary Syphilis Case Rates per 100,000 Population by County of Residence, Arizona 2003-2008



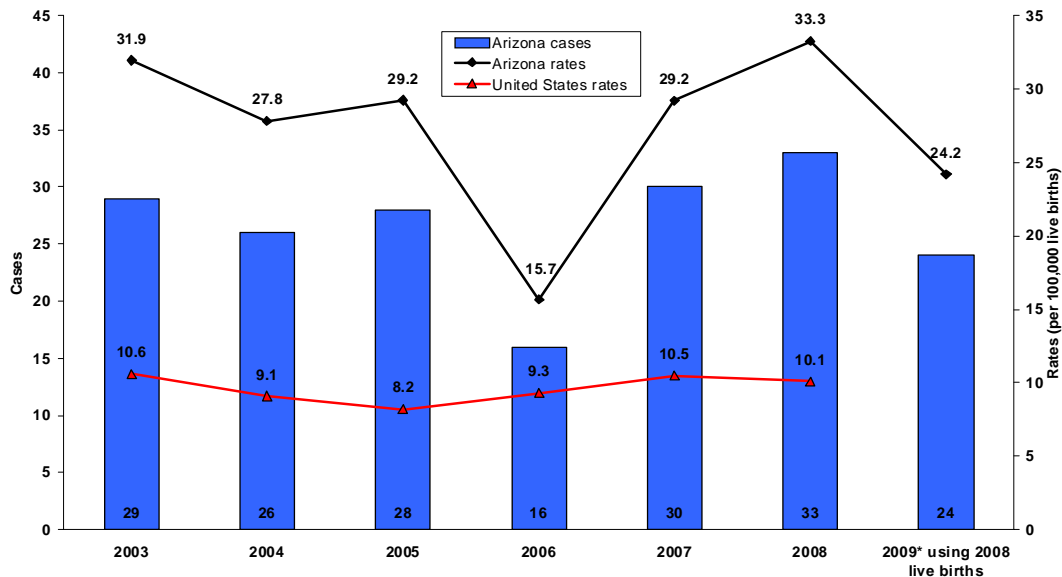
We have extraordinarily high rates of primary and secondary syphilis in our community, which means that syphilis is actively circulating (all of these cases are infectious). To give some perspective, the US rate in 2007 was 3.8/100,000 population while Pima County's rate that year was 8.0/100,000 population. The 2010 Target is 0.2 cases/100,000 population.

While many of the communities in the nation who are also in syphilis outbreak have had a preponderance of cases in males, and in particular men who have sex with men, the outbreak in Pima County has had a relatively greater percentage of both females and heterosexuals. This creates the setting where congenital syphilis can occur.

Figure 7. Reported Primary and Secondary Syphilis Cases by Gender and Sexual Preference, Pima County 2003-2008



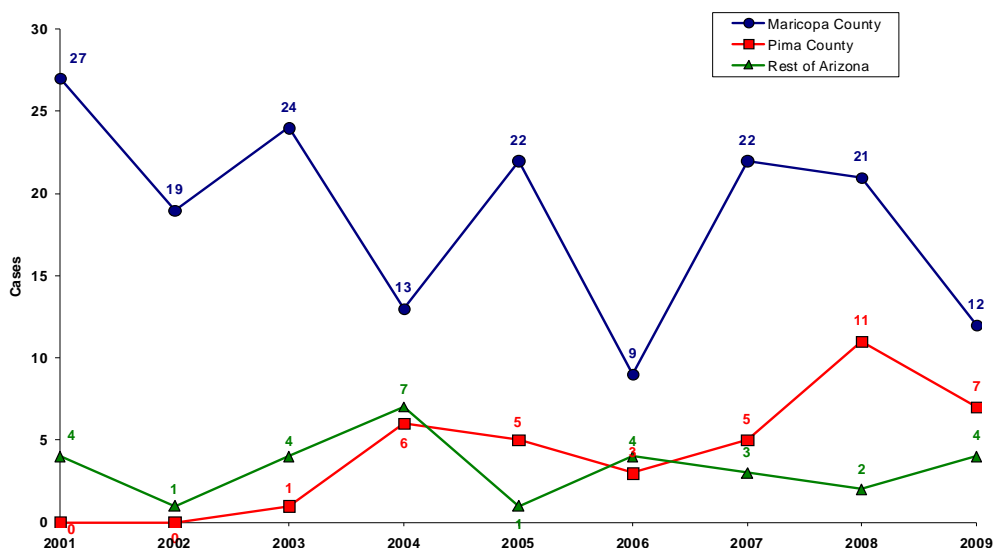
Reported Congenital Syphilis Cases and Case Rates per 100,000 Live Births by Birth Year, Arizona and United States 2003-2008



*2009 Cases are preliminary and reported as of 2/2/2010

Arizona was #1 for rates of congenital syphilis in the nation from 2003-2005, and we remain one of the most highly impacted states in the nation. During the late 1990's to ~2001, there were hardly any congenital syphilis cases in Pima County, but since we started our syphilis outbreak in 2001, numbers of congenital syphilis cases have been rising. As can be seen from the diagram below, Pima County has accounted for a significant percentage of Arizona's cases, especially considering Maricopa County has ~quadruple our population.

**Reported Congenital Syphilis (by Birth Year) Cases by County
Arizona 2003-2008**



*2009 Cases are preliminary and reported as of 2/2/2010

I am asking all of you to keep syphilis in the differential diagnosis. If you see a patient with a genital sore, it is syphilis until proven otherwise – please test AND if possible start therapy. If you see a patient for any sexually transmitted complaint, please check a syphilis serology. Please offer syphilis screening at least annually to any of your patients with more than one sexual partner in the past year. If you work in an acute care setting, especially ED or Urgent Care Center, please ask any pregnant women you see if they are in prenatal care. If not, please consider testing them for syphilis. The recommendation for communities like ours with high rates of infectious and congenital syphilis is to screen pregnant women in the first and third trimesters as well as at the time of birth. Finally, if you see and treat someone with suspected syphilis, please report this to the Pima County Health Department at 624-8271. We actively investigate all syphilis cases to assure completion of therapy as well as treatment of partners – a necessary component to stopping this outbreak.

The STD Program in the Pima County Health Department can assist you in evaluating and treating suspected syphilis cases. We are happy to “consult” or answer any questions that you may have about testing, interpretation of labs or therapy. We do have long acting bicillin, and if you do not carry it in your office, you can refer patients to us for treatment. We also have access to the state database of syphilis serologies, and when there is a difficult management situation related to possible prior episodes of syphilis, we can provide this information to treating clinicians to guide diagnosis. Please call our STD Program at 624-8271 for any questions, and feel free to refer your patients to us at the Theresa Lee Clinic, 332 S. Freeway.

Sincerely,

Michelle McDonald

Michelle McDonald, M.D.
Chief Medical Officer

Ss/ *Richard May*

Richard May, RN
STD Program Nurse Manager