

Los Angeles County Overview of STIs, 2023

The 2023 Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) Surveillance Report provides data on Syphilis, Gonorrhea and Chlamydia in Los Angeles County (LAC). This report is intended to inform government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders on the status of the STI epidemics in LAC. *Note that the data in this report do not include the cities of Long Beach and Pasadena and may not match previously published data.*

New to this Report

This report is now available in an online format and can be printed as needed. The 2023 report includes new data on:

- Congenital Syphilis
- HIV Co-infection
- STI Indicators
- Risk Factors (e.g. methamphetamine use, injection drug use, homelessness, incarceration)

Overall Findings

After over a decade long trend of increases in STIs, in 2023, LAC observed a slight decrease (0.2%) in reported cases of 3 reportable STI's (Syphilis, Gonorrhea and Chlamydia). In 2023, there were a total of 89,887 cases of Syphilis, Gonorrhea and Chlamydia reported to the LAC Department of Public Health. Chlamydia accounted for more than half of these reported cases (60%), followed by gonorrhea (29%) and syphilis (11%). Fifty-two percent of all syphilis cases were early syphilis (ES) diagnoses.

Syphilis

In 2023, 9,377 cases of syphilis were reported in LAC, including 1,929 primary and secondary (P&S) syphilis cases. LAC's P&S syphilis rate (21 cases per 100,000) was higher than both California (16 per 100,000) and the US (16 per 100,000). In 2023, 4,897 cases of ES were reported in LAC. ES represents recent infections (within 12 months). P&S syphilis are part of ES and are the most infectious stages of syphilis. Therefore, P&S and early syphilis cases are utilized to monitor the syphilis epidemic. The rate of ES cases in 2023 was 53 per 100,000, a 13% decrease from 2022. This represented the first decrease in ES rates after a decade of increases. The ES rate among males was almost 7 times higher than that in females, however, since 2014 female rates have risen 4.3-fold compared with males (1.9-fold). Males aged 30-34 years had the highest ES rates (217 per 100,000) compared with males of all other age groups and females aged 25-29 years had the highest ES rates (37 per 100,000) compared with females of all other age groups. Among males, Blacks and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (NHPI) had the highest rates of ES compared with other racial/ethnic groups (197 and 138 per 100,000, respectively). In females, Blacks had the highest rates at 32 per 100,000 compared with other racial/ethnic groups. ES rates were unstable for American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) males, and AIAN, NHPI and Asian females due to small numbers and therefore rates for these groups are not presented in this report. ES cases were unevenly distributed across LAC. In particular, the Metro service planning area (SPA 4) and related health districts (Central and Hollywood-Wilshire) had the highest rates of ES (158 and 185 per 100,000 residents, respectively).

Congenital Syphilis

In 2023, a total of 126 cases of congenital syphilis were reported, including 10 stillbirths. This represented an 8% decrease from the previous year and the first decrease since 2015. LAC's congenital syphilis rate was 148 per 100,000 live births, surpassing that of California and the US (122 and 106 per 100,000 live births, respectively). Since 2014, the number of reported congenital syphilis cases increased almost 4-fold, accompanied by a 6-fold increase in syphilis cases among females of childbearing age. In 2023, Latinx females represented more than a half of all mothers with congenital syphilis babies (63%), while Black and White mothers represented 16% and 14% respectively. Congenital syphilis rates were the highest in Metro SPA (320 cases per 100,000 live births).

Gonorrhea

In 2023, 26,163 gonorrhea cases were reported to LAC, representing a rate of 284 per 100,000. The gonorrhea rate in LAC was higher than California (190 per 100,000) and the US (180 per 100,000) and has increased 1.9-fold since 2014. Rates among males were 3.6 times higher than females in 2023 (443 vs. 123 per 100,000, respectively). By age, rates were highest among males aged 30-34 years and females aged 20-24 years (1,232 and 517 per 100,000, respectively). Black males and females had the highest rates compared with other race/ethnicities (949 and 323 per 100,000, respectively). As with ES, gonorrhea rates were highest in the Metro SPA (827 per 100,000) and Central and Hollywood-Wilshire health districts (815 and 1,150 per 100,000 residents respectively).

Chlamydia

In 2023, 54,221 chlamydia cases were reported to LAC, reflecting a case rate of 588 per 100,000, which was higher than California (491 per 100,000) and the US (492 per 100,000). Rates among females were 1.2 times higher than males (626 vs. 535 per 100,000). Chlamydia was most prevalent among males and females aged 20-24 years (1,592 and 3,421 per 100,000, respectively). In the State of California, health care providers are no longer required to report chlamydia cases but the reporting requirement for laboratories remains. Consequently, this report reflects chlamydia data reported by laboratories only which have less complete race/ethnicity information. As a result, rates cannot be calculated for racial/ethnic categories. Similar to syphilis and gonorrhea, chlamydia rates were highest in Metro SPA (1,010 per 100,000 residents) and South (1,143 per 100,000), Central (1,142 per 100,000), Hollywood-Wilshire (1,139 per 100,000), Southeast (1,020 per 100,000) and Southwest (1,004 per 100,000 residents) health districts.

HIV Co-infection

Almost a third of ES cases (31%), 13% of gonorrhea and 5% of chlamydia cases diagnosed in 2023 were co-infected with HIV. Since 2014, prevalence of HIV co-infection has consistently been highest among ES cases compared with chlamydia and gonorrhea cases, however, HIV-coinfection has decreased in ES and increased in gonorrhea, and chlamydia cases. In 2023, 40% of MSM¹ and MSMW¹ diagnosed with ES were co-infected with HIV. Since 2019, HIV co-infection in MSM and MSMW diagnosed with ES has been relatively stable, ranging from 40% to 47%.

STI indicators

In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the first STI National Strategic Plan for the US, which included indicators to measure progress toward the plan's goals. LAC is focusing efforts on the following indicators.

- Reduce primary and secondary syphilis rate
- Reduce congenital syphilis rate
- Reduce primary and secondary syphilis rate in MSM¹
- Reduce gonorrhea rate among African Americans/Blacks

Los Angeles County achieved the 2025 national target for primary and secondary syphilis among MSM¹ but fell significantly short of the remaining indicators. The 2023 PS rate in MSM¹ was 429 per 100,000 compared to the respective 2025 target of 440 per 100,000.

Risk factors

Since 2014, recent incarceration history among ES cases has decreased from 7% to 5% and homelessness has increased from 3% to 6%. Methamphetamine use, and intravenous drug use among ES cases has remained stable over the last decade (10% - 9% and 1% - 2%, respectively). In 2023, MSM¹ reported the lowest prevalence of influential risk factors for STI infection (methamphetamine use, homelessness and recent incarceration) compared with MSW¹, MSMW¹ and WSM¹. Note that from 2014 to 2023, 10% - 19% of early syphilis cases were missing gender of sex partner. Therefore, data on risk factors by sexual behavior should be interpreted with caution.

¹Men who have sex with men (MSM), men who have sex with women (MSW), men who have sex with men and women (MSMW), and women who have sex with men (WSM).