

## Director's Message

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the Sexual Health Review! In this edition, we continue to discuss aspects of sexual health and well-being with a focus on patient-provider communication. This includes a section introducing you to the amazing team that makes this newsletter possible, a portion highlighting the rise of syphilis, a local spotlight on work being done in Ontario County, and highlights from one of the first in the nation campaigns supporting Expedited Partner Treatment.

As we move into warmer weather, I always feel a bit rejuvenated after the coldness of winter. I hope all of you can find time to rejuvenate, too, despite the hard work that remains in front of us. I feel especially inspired by the picture of the Sexual Health Education Services team in this edition who, despite the hard work they do every day, bring joy and positivity to each other and their work!

Stay well,

Rachel Malloy



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# Sexual Health

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality. The American Sexual Health Association (ASHA) defines sexual health as, “the ability to embrace and enjoy our sexuality throughout our lives. It is an important part of our physical and emotional health.” (source: [ashasexualhealth.org](http://ashasexualhealth.org)). There are six aspects of sexual health as outlined in the [Sexual Health Review, Issue 3, October 2022](#).

## Communication

In this edition, we are highlighting communication and its connection to sexual health. Being able to openly talk about sexual health with your partner(s), as well as your health care provider(s) in an integral part of what it means to be sexually healthy. Talking about sex may make people uncomfortable. Often, patients shy away from discussing sex with their health care providers, while providers are sometimes uncomfortable broaching the subject with their patients. All of this uneasiness can result in misinformation and lead to misunderstanding.

For patients, having the ability to talk honestly to providers about their sexual health needs is key to receiving appropriate healthcare. Even though it's not always easy to talk to others about sex, especially providers, it's important to overcome the discomfort and discuss concerns and options with your health care provider. Here are resources to help make these conversations a little easier: [Conversation Tips | \(cdc.gov\)](http://cdc.gov) and [How To Talk About Sexual Health | \(healthysexuals.com\)](http://healthysexuals.com).

For providers, obtaining an accurate sexual health history can be tricky, especially when interaction time may be limited. [Adopting a patient-centered approach](#) to sexual health is key. All patients are entitled to a safe, welcoming, and affirming health care experience regardless of their sexual identity, expression, orientation, or experience. Taking patients' accurate sexual risk history, and having conversations about sexual behaviors specific to sites of infection, may yield more accurate responses from the patient and provide opportunities for patient education. Here are tools to assist providers with this essential aspect of communicating with their patients: [A Guide to Taking a Sexual History | CDC](#), [A New Approach to Sexual History Taking: A Video Series | NCSH \(nationalcoalitionforsexualhealth.org\)](#) and [Sexual Health Care | Clinical Guidelines Program](#).



# Introducing The Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology: Meet Our Staff

## Sexual Health Education Services

It is our pleasure to debut a new section of this newsletter, “**The Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology: Meet our Staff.**” The Sexual Health Education Services, or SHES team, works diligently to develop health promotion content, campaigns, and educational materials. These vehicles seek to raise awareness, increase knowledge, and normalize/destigmatize sexual health. Over the last year, the Sexual Health Education Services team has worked to increase New York State’s awareness of Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT), congenital syphilis, and overall sexual health. The team is comprised of three dedicated professionals: Diane Moore, Michael McNair, and Thaddeus Price.

Public Health Educator, **Diane Moore** joined the Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology in 2018 after 17 years as a coordinator for Reality Check, the youth action initiative for the New York State Tobacco Control Program. Diane’s experience with community engagement has helped her to bring that perspective to her work. She is passionate about creating campaigns and materials that are accurate, respectful, useful, and accessible to all. She is grateful to be surrounded and supported by a dynamic and creative team of professionals here at the Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology.

Special Projects Coordinator, **Michael McNair (Mike)**, started his 17-year public health career with the AIDS Council of Northeastern New York (now Alliance for Positive Health) in 2005 as the supervisor for men who have sex with men programming. Mike joined the AIDS Institute in 2008, with the Bureau of HIV/STI Field Services, specializing in Internet Partner Services and Partner Services programming. He then joined the Sexual Health Education Services creative collaboration team in 2023. Mike’s disease investigation experiences and knowledge of sexually transmitted infections and HIV community interventions has informed the Office’s cutting-edge approach to promoting sex positive sexual health for all.

Health Education Program Coordinator, **Thaddeus Price** joined the Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology in 2021 producing national trainings for the Disease Intervention Training Center team. Prior to joining the AIDS Institute, Thaddeus spent more than 10 years working in prevention education, with efforts focused on pregnancy prevention, sexually transmitted infection prevention, and HIV. The majority of his work has focused on the development and management of prevention programs and services directed toward communities of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), intersex, asexual, and others (LGBTQIA+) communities throughout New York State.

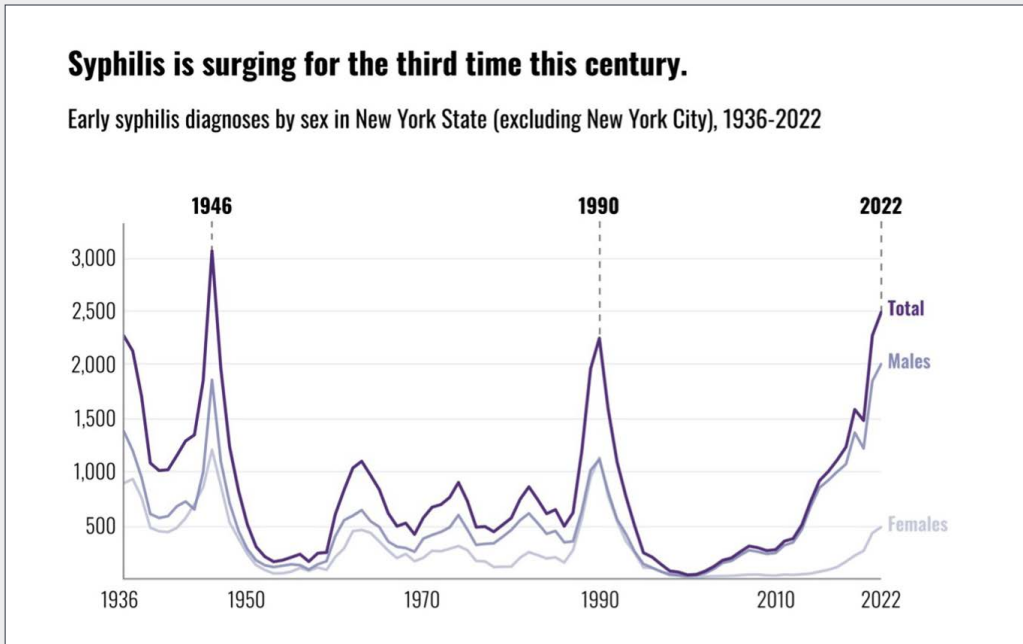
Overall, the Sexual Health Education Services team strives to provide New York State residents with equitable, comprehensive, and sex-positive sexual health education. The work promotes identity affirming, trauma-informed approaches to prevent infection, support healthy relationships, and validate the individual experience. For more information regarding the Sexual Health Education Services team, please contact [stdc@health.ny.gov](mailto:stdc@health.ny.gov).



*Ending the Epidemic 2023 Summit:  
From left to right: M. McNair, D. Moore, T. Price*



# Sexual Health Trends

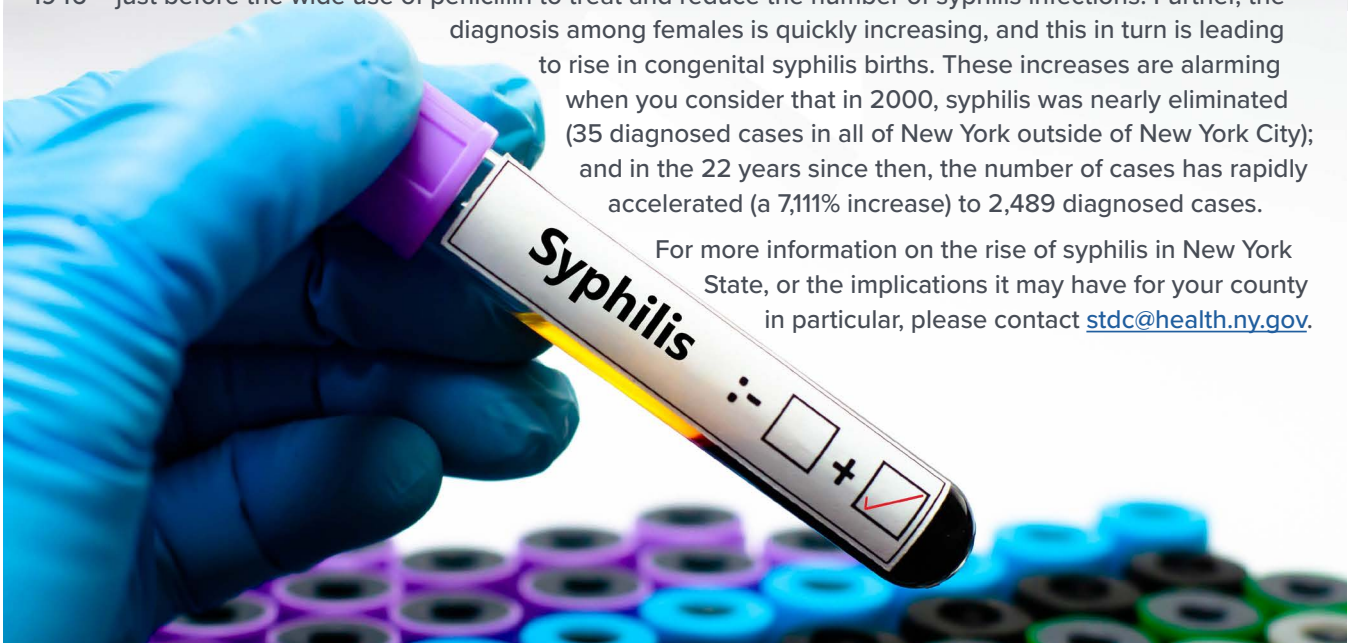


Source: New York State Department of Health Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology, Surveillance and Special Projects Unit

## Syphilis is Surging in New York State for the Third Time This Century

The graph above displays the diagnoses of early syphilis for New York State counties outside of New York City from 1936 through 2022. What becomes immediately apparent is that the total diagnoses (both males and females), have exceeded the total diagnoses last seen in 1990, which was at the height of the HIV epidemic in the State. Additionally, the diagnosis among males is now almost on par with the diagnoses in males last seen in 1946 – just before the wide use of penicillin to treat and reduce the number of syphilis infections. Further, the diagnosis among females is quickly increasing, and this in turn is leading to rise in congenital syphilis births. These increases are alarming when you consider that in 2000, syphilis was nearly eliminated (35 diagnosed cases in all of New York outside of New York City); and in the 22 years since then, the number of cases has rapidly accelerated (a 7,111% increase) to 2,489 diagnosed cases.

For more information on the rise of syphilis in New York State, or the implications it may have for your county in particular, please contact [stdc@health.ny.gov](mailto:stdc@health.ny.gov).



# Local Health Department Spotlight

## Ontario County Public Health’s “Sex Drive” Initiative

The Finger Lakes Sexual Health Coalition is a partnership between health departments and community-based organizations. The Coalition’s mission is to engage the public to improve the sexual health of residents of the Finger Lakes region.

**The days of the” Sex Talk” are over. Put on your seatbelts for The Sex Drive.**

One “vehicle” of engagement is *The Sex Drive*, a ten-week initiative which encourages parents to talk with their kids about body image, relationships, and sex during trips in the car to school, practice, friends’ houses, or the grocery store. The conversations are meant to be short and informal. Eye contact is discouraged (you’re driving, remember); no one can see you blush; and when you get there, it’s over. At the heart of The Sex Drive is the mantra: “*Your kids are going to learn about sex, let it be from you.*”



Each year, coalition members select topics and create “conversation starters” for parents to try out. The topics this year include social media and app safety, grooming, consent, birth control, sexually transmitted infections, and healthy communication and relationships. These are shared with the community via social media and weekly radio public service announcements.

Kate Ott, Public Health Director, and Matthew Hanggi, Communicable Disease Coordinator for Ontario County, kicked off the 2023-2024 campaign in September during an interview with Ted Baker at Finger Lakes News Radio in Geneva, New York. They discussed sexually transmitted infection trends and challenged caregivers to make discussions about growing bodies, relationships, and sexual health a routine part of family life. Teaching children about sex is not “one-and-done.” Starting early with simple, age-appropriate messages builds trust, decreases discomfort, and paves the way for weightier conversations as children navigate their teens and grow into adulthood.

**Every newborn deserves to enter the world syphilis-free.**

Ontario and surrounding counties participate in the New York State Congenital Syphilis Elimination Strategic Planning Group where subject matter experts, local health departments, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute work collaboratively to raise awareness, define best practices, and provide guidance. Congenital syphilis should be a thing of the past. However, increased disease burden in the community has spilled over into our tiniest residents.

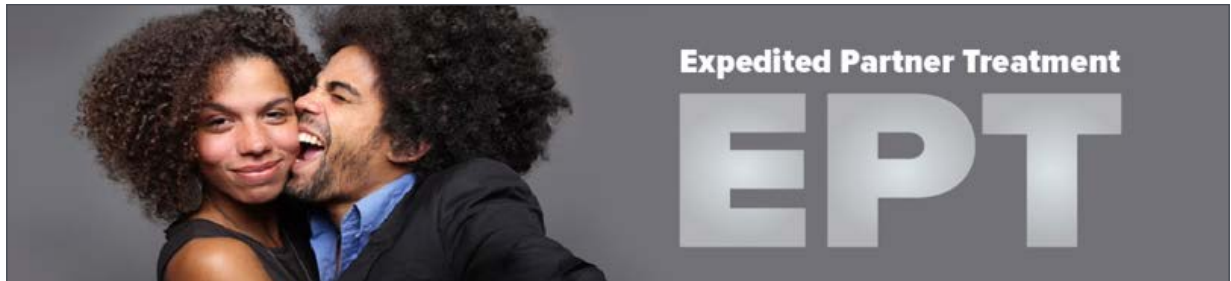
The resurgence of syphilis in the 21<sup>st</sup> century punctuates other challenges our communities are facing. Now more than ever, it’s imperative to address the intersection of substance use disorders, the criminal justice system, poverty, and inequitable access to healthcare. In Ontario County, members of the Finger Lake’s Sexual Health Coalition are partnering with a substance use treatment center and the county jail to learn how clients’ lived experiences affect health behaviors and how to best prevent and treat syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections.

Other projects of the Finger Lakes Sexual Health Coalition include educating the medical community about testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, particularly the legality and efficacy of Expedited Partner Treatment. Additionally, members assemble and disseminate safer sex kits to businesses in their communities.

Finger Lakes Sexual Health Coalition members include the counties of Chemung, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne and Yates as well as truly exceptional community partners: Catholic Charities, Family Counseling of the Finger Lakes, Finger Lakes Community Health, Finger Lakes Area Counseling & Recovery Agency, Finger Lakes Radio, and Trillium Health.

*Contributed by Matthew Hanggi, Ontario County Public Health*

## The Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology Launches Multimedia Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT)\* Campaign



The Office recently launched a multimedia educational campaign, one of the first in the nation, aimed at increasing awareness of the availability of Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT) as a strategy in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections. Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT) is the clinical practice of treating the sexual partners of people diagnosed with sexually transmitted infections without a health care provider exam.

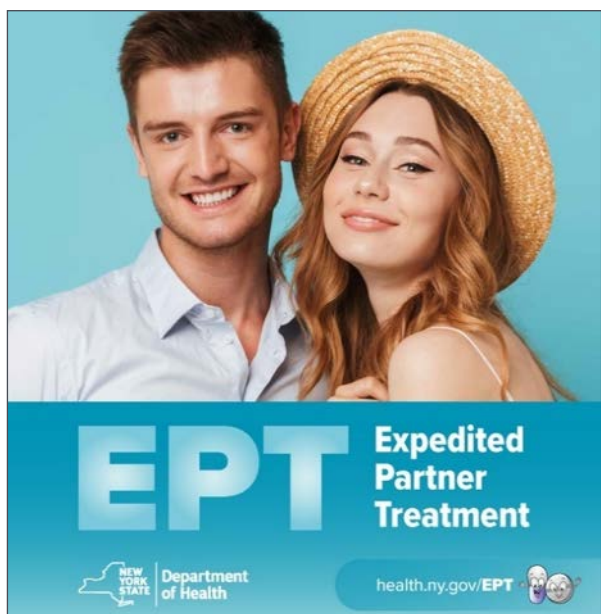
New Yorkers are encouraged to take advantage of Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT) as it can lead to faster partner treatment and greater access to sexual healthcare. The practice of providing Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT) is especially important as it is one of the few sexual health tools available to reduce the rising number of sexually transmitted infections.

In New York State, Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT) allows health care providers to give medication or a prescription to patients diagnosed with chlamydia, gonorrhea, and trichomoniasis to deliver to their sexual partner(s), so they can also be treated, without requiring a clinical examination.

Another important aspect of this campaign is to introduce the community-led, practice-based name change adopted in New York State, from Expedited Partner **Therapy** to Expedited Partner **Treatment** to ensure broad understanding of the practice.

To request campaign materials, including an Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT) Zoom/MS Teams background and signature graph to use on your local platforms, or for more information, contact the Expedited Partner Treatment (EPT) team at [EPT@health.ny.gov](mailto:EPT@health.ny.gov).

*\*Expedited Partner Treatment is also known as Expedited Partner Therapy*





## Mpox Updates

As of March 2024, the number of new cases of mpox in New York State remains low. However, mpox continues to spread in New York and nationally. While anyone can get mpox, diagnoses have been primarily among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men.

Vaccination, as well as testing for those experiencing symptoms are now widely available across New York State. Completion of the two-dose JYNNEOS vaccine series remains one of our most vital tools to protect against mpox.

Patients should be informed that healthy practices continue to be important, including being aware of mpox symptoms, avoiding any sexual activity and physical, nonsexual contact when feeling sick, and having open conversations with partners about vaccination history and symptoms before engaging in sexual activity. No vaccine is 100% effective; however, even where mpox infection after vaccination does occur, evidence shows the vaccine reduces the severity of symptoms.

The New York State Department of Health continues to encourage health care providers to offer vaccination and other mpox services and information as a part of routine sexual healthcare. As a reminder, providers interested in offering the JYNNEOS vaccine to their patients – or those who have questions about the mpox response – can email [mpox@health.ny.gov](mailto:mpox@health.ny.gov). For additional information on mpox, visit [Mpox \(ny.gov\)](https://www.health.ny.gov/mpox).



# Upcoming Trainings

## Clinical Education Initiative

The Clinical Education Initiative announces the availability of **new, online, accredited courses:**



**CLINICAL  
EDUCATION  
INITIATIVE**

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH AIDS INSTITUTE

- **EACS 2023: Highlights from the European AIDS Conference in Warsaw**
- **Empowering Cisgender Women: Inclusion and Awareness of PrEP**
- **2023 New York State Hepatitis C and Drug User Health Conference**
- **Strategies to Prevent Overdose in New York State: A Harm Reduction Framework**
- **Long-Acting Injectables Implementation—Lessons Learned**
- **Hepatitis C and Alcohol**
- **2023 Update on Immunization Recommendations for Individuals with and at-risk for HIV Disease**
- **Innovative Strategies in HIV Care and Prevention: 2023 HIV Primary Care and Prevention Annual Conference**
- **Medical Marijuana: Exploring New Clinical Options in New York State**
- **Clinical Research Highlights from IAS 2023**
- **What is Chemsex? Epidemiology, Harms & Impacts**

### and new Learning Modules:

- **ECHO: Preparing Your Clinic for LAIs Implementation**
- **ECHO: Counseling Experienced HIV Patients on Best ART Regimen**
- **ECHO: Updates on ARTs “What’s on the Horizon?”**
- **ECHO: HIV Counseling, Testing, and Linkage to Care**
- **ECHO: Basic HIV Primary Care**
- **ECHO: Long-Acting Injectables (LAIs) for HIV Treatment**
- **ECHO: Review of Commonly Prescribed Antimicrobials for Sexually Transmitted Infections: Pharmacy Pearls and Considerations**
- **ECHO: Development of an Inclusive Peer-Led Sexual Health Education Program for Undergraduate Students: Experiences and Lessons Learned from SUNY Geneseo**
- **ECHO: Street Medicine: Care on the Margins**

Visit [www.CEITraining.org](http://www.CEITraining.org) for more information, to request training, and to find additional sexual health resources: live and online trainings, webinars, preceptorships, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and Drug User Health ECHO sessions.

The Clinical Education Initiative [Podcast](#) features conversations with clinical experts in HIV Primary Care and Prevention, Sexual Health, Hepatitis C and Drug User Health. Our episodes feature Clinical Education Initiative clinicians’ experience and insight on the current health issues, alongside the latest news and guidelines in our areas of expertise.



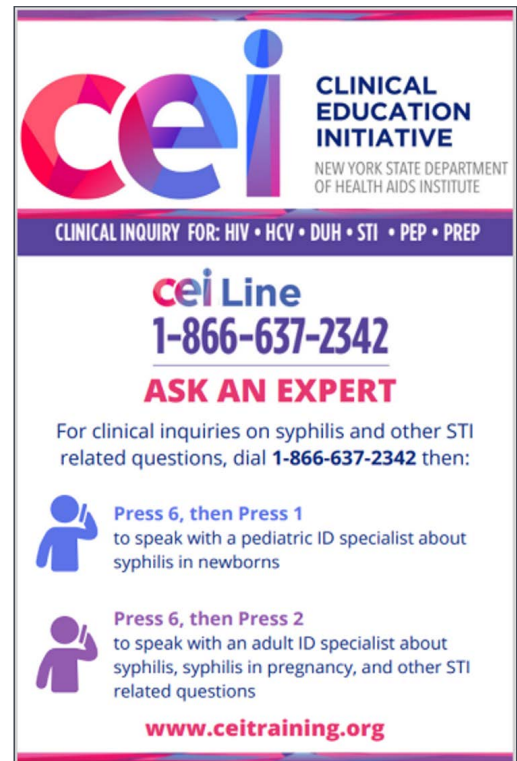
# Upcoming Trainings

The Clinical Education Initiative Health Center of Excellence held its 10<sup>th</sup> Annual New York State Sexual Health Conference on Friday May 10, 2024 in Saratoga Springs, NY.

This free event was intended for New York State clinicians and other public health professionals.

**Need assistance with congenital syphilis prevention options for pregnant persons with syphilis? Contact the Clinical Education Initiative or CEI Line!**

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Sexual Health Review, we announced the launch of the collaborative work with the Clinical Education Initiative Sexual Health Center of Excellence Congenital Syphilis Prevention Program. This is a collaborative effort between the Clinical Education Initiative and the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute's Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology and the Bureau of HIV/STI Partner Services. The program offers educational consultation to health care providers and public health representatives on persons diagnosed with syphilis in pregnancy. It includes protected health information sharing that facilitates behind-the-scenes enhanced monitoring of treatment and follow up to optimize prevention of congenital syphilis. The **CEI Line 1.866.637.2342** is a toll-free number for clinicians in New York State to discuss with a specialist a variety of topics, including HIV, Sexual Health, and Drug User Health patient management.





**cei** CLINICAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE  
NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AIDS INSTITUTE

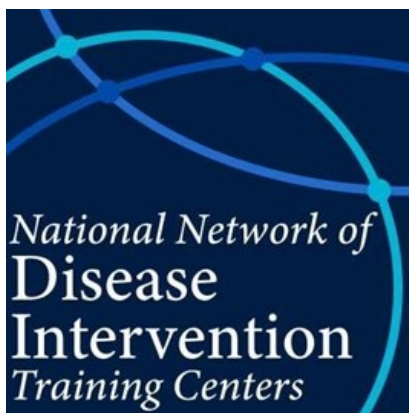
CLINICAL INQUIRY FOR: HIV • HCV • DUH • STI • PEP • PREP

**cei Line**  
**1-866-637-2342**  
**ASK AN EXPERT**

For clinical inquiries on syphilis and other STI related questions, dial **1-866-637-2342** then:

-  **Press 6, then Press 1** to speak with a pediatric ID specialist about syphilis in newborns
-  **Press 6, then Press 2** to speak with an adult ID specialist about syphilis, syphilis in pregnancy, and other STI related questions

[www.ceitraining.org](http://www.ceitraining.org)



## New York Disease Intervention Training Center (DITC)

### Looking for Disease Intervention Training?

You can access the Constant Contact Newsletter sign-up to stay connected with us and future trainings: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/75 mL6ts>.

For more information, please visit our website <https://www.hivtrainingny.org/ditcregion1> or email: [Atticus.Ranck@health.ny.gov](mailto:Atticus.Ranck@health.ny.gov)

# New York State Department of Health Initiatives

## **Congenital Syphilis Elimination Strategic Planning Group**

A New York State Congenital Syphilis Elimination Strategic Planning Group Full-body meeting was held on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The meeting focused on finalizing recommendations and priority setting. The continued purpose of the planning group is to develop a comprehensive Congenital Syphilis Elimination Framework for New York State. The group includes partnerships with subject matter experts, health care providers, community-based organizations, persons impacted, and the general community.

**The Planning Group continues to be guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s categorization. Below are five critical Missed Prevention Opportunities for Prevention of Congenital Syphilis as the core of this group:**

1. Late identification of seroconversion during pregnancy
2. No timely prenatal care and no timely syphilis testing
3. Untimely syphilis testing despite proof of timely prenatal care
4. Inadequate maternal treatment despite proof of timely syphilis diagnosis
5. Clinical evidence of congenital syphilis despite maternal treatment completion

The recommendations and strategies from the Congenital Syphilis Elimination Strategic Planning Group will focus on these critical missed opportunities focus listed above. Members will also establish how these recommendations address health equity.

Though the Congenital Syphilis Elimination Strategic Planning Group membership is closed, the membership survey will remain open for those who may be interested in working with us in the future. To indicate your interest, or to get more information, please complete the survey using the QR code or this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WXQVCVY>. Both offer more information on the group’s mission, goals, time commitment for members, and instructions to apply.



# New York State Department of Health Initiatives



## Office of Drug User Health (ODUH) AIDS Institute Screening of Documentary Film: *ParTy Boi: Black Diamonds in Ice Castles*

In October 2023 the Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology collaborated with the Office of Drug User Health to present an AIDS Institute-wide internal screening of the documentary film, *ParTy Boi: Black Diamonds in Ice Castles* produced by Micheal Rice. The purpose for this film screening was to internally educate the AIDS Institute, increase awareness of the issues, and to provide a deeper understanding about the disproportionate impact of crystal meth use among the Black and Latino gay, bisexual, and transgender communities in New York. The film utilized a powerful, raw narrative and the perspective of people with lived experiences to address the inequities that Black and Brown Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning (LGBTQ) face. These inequities also fuel the drug epidemic that placed these vulnerable communities at risk for addiction and acquisition on HIV/AIDS. The documentary focused on the urgency to normalize conversations about HIV/AIDS prevention methods, and spotlighted historical facts about the world-renowned ballroom scene.

Micheal Rice is an award-winning filmmaker, producer, and creative director. His work focuses on bringing stories of cisgender Black gay men, particularly surrounding substance and opioid use, and HIV to the forefront of society while encompassing his stance as an activist.

# AIDS Institute Provider Directory: STI Services

The AIDS Institute Provider Directory allows providers and consumers easier access to STI service providers across New York State. This directory is ideal for consumers who are interested in obtaining STI services and/or resources or information. If you are a provider, [register with the Provider Directory](#) if you would like to promote your services.

The screenshot displays the website's navigation and search features. At the top left is the New York State logo. The main navigation menu includes 'Services', 'News', 'Government', and 'COVID-19'. Below this is a purple header for the 'Provider Directory' with sub-links: 'HOME', 'ABOUT US', 'ENDING THE EPIDEMIC', 'MORE INFORMATION', 'FOR PROVIDERS', 'CONTACT US', and 'LOG IN'. The search section is titled 'Search' and includes a 'Select service type' filter with icons for HIV, HCV, PrEP, PEP, Buprenorphine, STI Services (selected), Opioid Overdose Prevention Program, ESAP, HCV Rapid Testing Site, and SEP. A 'PEP Hotline' section lists phone numbers for NYC and outside NYC. A 'Filter' section offers options for 'Current GPS', 'Zip Code', 'Agency/Facility Name', 'County', and 'All NYS'. A 'SEARCH' button is located at the bottom left of the search area.



# Questions, Feedback, and More

## Email us at [stdc@health.ny.gov](mailto:stdc@health.ny.gov) to:

- Let us know what you would like to see in an upcoming newsletter
- Inquire about sexual health education and/or clinical questions
- Request data or technical assistance
- Receive free sexual health educational materials

## **NYSDOH AIDS Institute Office of Sexual Health & Epidemiology**

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Albany, NY 12237-0670

**Phone:** 518-474-3598

**Fax:** 518-486-5927

**Email:** [stdc@health.ny.gov](mailto:stdc@health.ny.gov)

**Online:** <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/>