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Syphilis in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease caused by *Tréponema pallidum*. The first cases were reported over 500 years ago, in Italy. Even though the worldwide efforts to eradicate the disease until the end of the 20th century, the numbers of infections have increased in the last years, mostly among teenagers. In addition to the chronic complications that can remain if the infection is not properly treated, it subserves the HIV coinfection. The recent increase of reports shows that it is still a public health threat. The purpose of this article is to describe and discuss the increase of syphilis infection among adolescents, as well as its risk factors. **Methodology:** Cases reported to the Epidemiological Bulletin of the Health Department of the State of Pernambuco, between 2011 and 2015, were analyzed and compared. The range age was 10 to 49 years. **Results:** There was an increase in the number of reported cases of syphilis in all age groups. The highest proportional increase was found among adolescents, 6 times higher in 2015 than in 2011. There was also a prevalence in females due to asymptomatic genital infections, female recipient anatomy in the sexual act and gender inequality. The main risk factors are infrequent condom use, sexual abuse, school backwardness, the use of licit and illicit drugs, and low socioeconomic conditions. Concurrently with the outbreak of syphilis, there is a lack of benzathine penicillin, standard antimicrobial used for proper treatment. Pregnant adolescents are the second group with the highest incidence of the disease. This fact, along with the lack of penicillin, may predispose to an increase in newborns with congenital syphilis. It is important to emphasize that there can still be great underreporting. **Conclusion:** The number of cases has increased over the last years. Adolescents are by themselves a vulnerable group. It is essential that the Government provide investment in universal access to education and health, campaigns to encourage the use of condoms, and the expansion of the discussion about gender equality. There is also an urgency for mobilization to expand production of benzathine penicillin.

Keywords: Adolescents; Syphilis

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