



# SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY *Messenger* Public Health Laboratory

March 2015

## Ocular Syphilis Clusters - California and Washington

Public Health officials in California and Washington State are reporting clusters of ocular syphilis and alerting the medical community to have a low threshold for testing patients with ocular complaints using the Rapid Plasma regain (RPR) test. Proven cases have occurred in HIV-infected and uninfected men who have sex with men (MSM) as well as heterosexual men. Several cases have resulted in significant and permanent loss of vision, including blindness.

Correct laboratory diagnosis of syphilis requires the use of both a non-treponemal test such as RPR with a treponemal test such as TP-PA.

## Measles Outbreak

The San Luis Obispo Public Health Laboratory (PHL) is performing a rt-PCR assay on a daily basis. There is no charge for testing specimens (throat swabs, and urine) on patient with signs and symptoms consistent with a possible diagnosis of measles. No cases of measles have been identified to date in San Luis Obispo County, although a single case of post-measles vaccine infection has been identified. Further testing of measles PCR negative specimens from patients with significant rash illness has revealed infections with *Respiratory Syncytial Virus* and *Influenza Type A H3* viruses.

Measles has been confirmed in 132 California residents residing in 15 local health jurisdictions (Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Marin, Merced, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano and Ventura counties and the cities of Long Beach and Pasadena).

## Vaccine Neglect – Tetanus

The State Department of Public Health investigators have found new evidence for vaccine neglect with a resurgence of a forgotten disease: tetanus. Tetanus is an acute and sometimes fatal illness due to the production of a neurologic toxin by *Clostridium tetani*, commonly infecting tissues of deep, dirty wounds. During the period of January 2008 to March 2014, 21 cases of tetanus were reported, all of whom were hospitalized and five (24%) were fatal.

Sixteen patients reported a variety of acute injuries including punctures, abrasions, linear lacerations, compound fractures and one animal bite. Of the 16 patients who reported acute injuries, nine sought medical care, but only two of these received post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Seven patients had conditions associated with increased risk of tetanus; four were diabetic and three were injecting drug users.

Even minor wounds or abrasions can result in tetanus, pointing to the importance of maintaining up-to-date vaccination with tetanus toxoid. (MMWR: March 16, 2015)