

NEW YORK LAUNCHES FIRST-EVER SYPHILIS DURING PREGNANCY AWARENESS DAY: A PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS STORY IN NEW YORK

POLICY SUCCESS STORIES

BACKGROUND

New York State made history on August 25, 2025, by becoming the first state in the U.S. to recognize Syphilis During Pregnancy Awareness Day. NCSD talked with three individuals from the New York State Department of Health, Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology, AIDS Institute who were instrumental in its development: Rachel Malloy, Bethsabet De Leon-Stevens, and Diane Moore.

Building off New York's momentum, NCSD aims for this Success Story to help other jurisdictions launch their own Syphilis During Pregnancy Awareness Day this August.



National Coalition
of STD Directors

New York’s awareness campaign wasn’t created in isolation; the Department had been working on multiple, overlapping projects for some time, and their ideas converged after the DIS Workforce supplemental grant was rescinded in 2023. The New York State Department of Health (NYSDH) had been planning several educational campaigns to increase awareness of syphilis and congenital syphilis.

However, after the DIS Workforce supplemental funds were rescinded and the state concurrently implemented a [new law requiring third-trimester testing](#), NYSDH staff decided to pursue a different strategy that would require less money while capitalizing on the increased visibility of congenital syphilis: Syphilis During Pregnancy Awareness Day.



August 25, 2025

New York landmarks will be illuminated to honor

Syphilis During Pregnancy Awareness Day

Syphilis can impact pregnancy and reproductive health. If you test positive, getting treated during pregnancy can protect you, your baby, and your partner from serious health issues. Talk to a health care provider about testing.

To learn more visit health.ny.gov/preventCS

 **Department of Health** 



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IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

To begin, a decision needed to be made as to when an Awareness Day would be most appropriate. While NYSDH originally planned to host the awareness day in January during Birth Defects Awareness Week, there were logistical constraints and the conceptual approach did not fully meet their needs. More specifically, they realized they might misalign the Awareness Day with the impacts on the infant rather than ensuring a broader understanding of the social determinants of syphilis during pregnancy.

Concurrently, the NYSDH staff pursued their internal proclamation approval process by working with the state's public affairs and communications teams to align a press release with a proclamation, and the date of August 25 was chosen. To ensure raised visibility of an Awareness Day, the Sexual Health Education Services team from the Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology pitched and pursued an innovative strategy: lighting up state monuments across different parts of the state in distinctive magenta and white hues. This strategy was a free and highly publicized way to convey messaging associated with syphilis during pregnancy and congenital syphilis.

In tandem with the monument lighting, Syphilis During Pregnancy Awareness Day was launched with a marketing initiative that included social media messaging already curated by the health department during previous campaign preparations. The team plans to further bolster their outreach by hosting community baby showers with incentives purchased by family planning services to create a safe space for community discussion on pregnancy and STIs.



WHAT ARE SOME KEY LESSONS LEARNED?

Collaborate with partners outside of the Health Department.

NYSDH noted that the work of their [Congenital Syphilis Elimination Strategic Planning Group](#) helped build a strong case that syphilis during pregnancy is a community-wide concern requiring statewide effort.

For an effective public health campaign with limited resources, maximize accessible and affordable outlets.

Given limited funding for STI education and health promotion, the awareness day idea was conceived as a strategy to raise awareness at no cost. Unfortunately, many health departments are not equipped with sufficient marketing dollars to launch massive campaigns, so leveraging affordable or free platforms (i.e. pre-existing materials, monuments or other iconic public places in a jurisdiction, etc.) can help make a campaign feasible.

Build internal consensus to move forward.

NYSDH staff emphasized that it is possible to find and uplift champions across teams within the health department who recognize the interconnected impact between congenital syphilis and other public health concerns like maternal health disparities, which can broaden the appeal and support for initiatives like an awareness day.

Prepare ahead of time for the proclamation process.

While each jurisdiction may have its own unique protocol, preparing ahead of time for the proclamation and press release will help streamline the process. Check out examples of the state's [press release](#) and the [proclamation](#).