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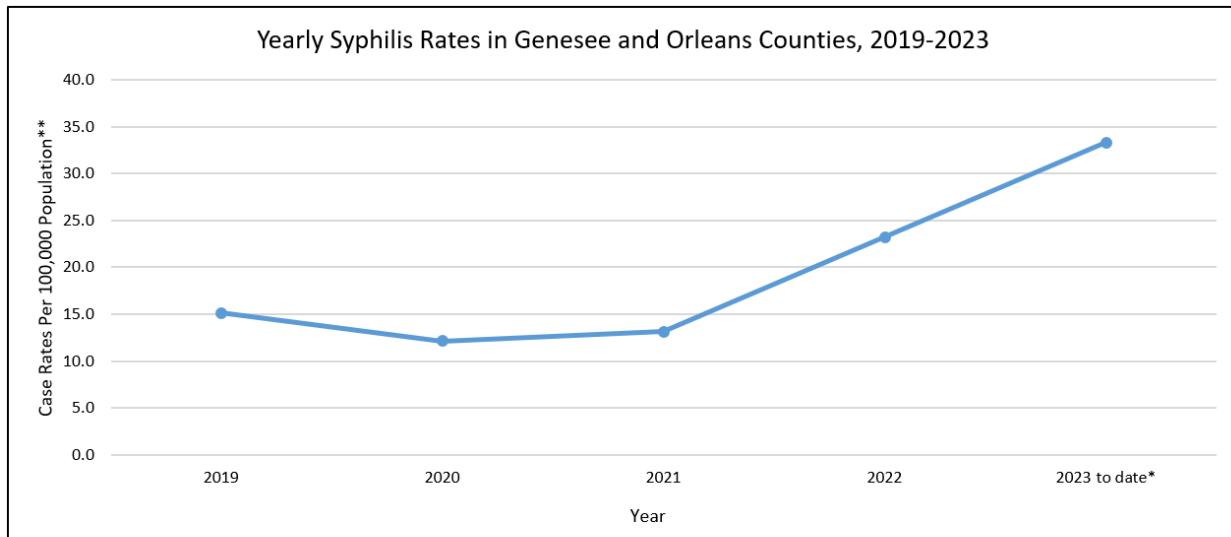## RELEASE DATE:

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rise in Syphilis and Congenital Syphilis Cases

The Genesee and Orleans County Health Departments (GO Health) are alerting residents to rising cases of syphilis and congenital syphilis. Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that is most often spread through sexual contact. Congenital syphilis is a preventable disease that occurs when a mother with syphilis passes the infection on to the baby during pregnancy. In 2020, there were 12.1 confirmed cases of syphilis per 100,000 population and to date in 2023, there have been 33.3 cases per 100,000 population, which include confirmed cases and probable cases pending investigation. With a rise in cases, particularly among women, GO Health has also seen a rise in congenital syphilis cases.

Yearly Syphilis Rates in Genesee and Orleans Counties, 2019-2023

*Includes probable cases and pending investigations
**Population Source: https://censusreporter.org/

Syphilis and congenital syphilis can lead to serious health complications, but they are preventable with screening, early detection, and treatment. "Syphilis is caused by a bacteria that enters the body during oral, vaginal or anal sex. It can also enter through broken skin that

is exposed to the syphilis bacteria", stated Brenden Bedard, Director of Community Health Services for GO Health. "Newborns can get congenital syphilis before birth or during vaginal delivery if the mother has syphilis."

Signs and symptoms of syphilis may or may not be noticeable. They may include a painless sore on the genitals, anus or mouth; a rash on the body; tiredness; fever; sore throat; headaches; swollen glands; loss of appetite; weight loss; patchy hair loss; muscle aches and fatigue. Oftentimes the signs of syphilis go away and the person does not have it checked out. If not treated for syphilis, an infected person even without symptoms can still infect others, including an unborn baby. Having syphilis once does not protect you from getting it again, even after successful treatment. A person can get it many times, so that is why people and their partner(s) must get tested and successfully treated. If your sex partner(s) does not get tested or treated, you may get syphilis again. The longer the person waits to be treated, the more damage the disease causes to the body.

Syphilis can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm birth, neonatal death, blindness or deafness, bone abnormalities, skin lesions, developmental delays, and other serious health problems to a developing baby. The best way to protect babies from congenital syphilis is to get screened throughout the pregnancy and just prior to delivery.

Here are some ways to prevent the spread of syphilis:
- Not having sex (abstinence) is the only sure way to avoid infection.
- Limit sex partners, especially if pregnant.
- Use latex or polyurethane condoms each time during oral, anal or vaginal sex.
- If you or your partner have any sores on the genitalia, anus, or mouth, or unexplained rashes on the body, talk with your healthcare provider and get tested. Do not have sex until both partners are fully treated.
- Get tested often for sexually transmitted infections/diseases.
- If you are pregnant, talk with your healthcare provider about being tested to protect your baby.
- If you know someone who is pregnant, encourage them to get tested.

For more information on Syphilis and other Sexually Transmitted Infections, visit the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention website.

For more information on Health Department programs and services, visit GOHealthNY.org or call your respective health department at:

- Genesee County: 585-344-2580 ext. 5555
- Orleans County: 585-589-3278

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