

Congenital syphilis is a chronic infectious disease caused by the spirochete *treponema pallidum* and transmitted by an infected mother to the fetus in the womb. Adults transmit syphilis through sexual contact. (For information on syphilis in adults choose "Syphilis" as your search term in the Rare Disease Database). In 1998, the National Syphilis Elimination Plan went into effect. One of the goals of this plan was to reduce the incidence of congenital syphilis (CS) to fewer than 40 cases per 100,000 live births. The incidence of congenital syphilis in newborns under a year old rose in the United States from 180 cases in 1957 to 422 cases in 1972. More recently there has been a dramatic increase of congenital syphilis, especially in urban areas, that has been attributed in part to crack cocaine use. In the year 2000, the incidence rate was about 13.4 per 100,000 live births, which represented about 529 cases. The diagnosis of CS may be delayed because the symptoms are not always evident. However, any child of a mother infected with syphilis should be suspected for congenital syphilis. If the signs and symptoms are not obviously those of CS, then further testing will be required, including (1) the examination of blood samples for antibodies to the spirochete infection and (2) identification of the syphilis bacterium under a light microscope.