Benzathine Penicillin G Shortage

In January of 2024, Pfizer announced a shortage of long acting benzathine penicillin G (Bicillin-LA) due to increased demand. The CDC recommends treating syphilis patients with doxycycline if penicillin is not available. The exception to this is pregnant women with syphilis, who should receive penicillin G. This prompted some states to announce that remaining benzathine penicillin G was to be reserved for only pregnant women, and all other patients with syphilis to be treated with doxycycline. Pfizer announced this month that benzathine penicillin G would now have more availability but predicts shortages may be expected through 2024.

The challenges in urgent care include availability, cost, need for refrigerated storage, and infrequent use of benzathine penicillin G. There is also a concern with doxycycline that patients may not be compliant with a full course of treatment. It is much easier to ensure treatment when it is provided in a single dose in clinic at the time of diagnosis. Although other medications such as ceftriaxone, doxycycline and azithromycin have been used successfully to treat syphilis, studies have only supported the use of benzathine penicillin G. For this reason, the only recommended treatment per CDC guidelines is benzathine penicillin G.

The CUCM Clinical Response Committee supports the use of benzathine penicillin G for the treatment of primary and secondary syphilis per CDC guidelines. We recommend clinics stock benzathine penicillin G if possible. If this is not feasible, or unavailable, we recommend aligning with your local public health department or other local clinic or hospital to arrange for patients to receive benzathine penicillin G in a timely fashion. Patients should be treated with doxycycline only if no other option for benzathine penicillin G exists.

For more information:

https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/p-and-s-syphilis.htm
https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/drug-notices.htm