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Increased Incidence of Congenital Syphilis

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Abstract

Background: Congenital syphilis occurs when a pregnant mother passes the syphilis infection to their child during pregnancy. This treatable sexually transmitted infection (STI) is the leading cause of stillbirths and neonatal deaths (Trivedi et al., 2020). According to the CDC (2021), the incidence of congenital syphilis increased 254% from 2016 to 2020. The key factors include decreased funding for STI education, decreased access to care, limited resources such as transportation and health insurance, stigma that is associated with diagnosis and treatment and legal issues that may be present such as undocumented migrants (Contraceptive Technology Update, 2022).

Objective: Increase the education for STI prevention and treatment to decrease the incidence of congenital syphilis.

Methods: Through the research design Plan/Do/Study/Act increased education will help to bring awareness of prevention and treatment to women of childbearing ages. Inclusion of community resources such as community centers, rural health clinics, health departments and schools will assist in capturing a more diverse population as well as a greater number of patients. Education will occur as a standard at well child appointments, prenatal screenings, during health classes and at community centers. Comparison of congenital syphilis diagnosis from pre- and post-education implementation will provide data to indicate significance.

Conclusion: Through implementation of extended education points the healthcare team can reach a greater number of patients and ensure swift and adequate treatment. Syphilis is a treatable infection and when detected and treated in a timely manner will lessen the risk to the unborn child. Utilizing healthcare and community services can provide the necessary education for eliminating poor outcomes for neonates.

Key words: congenital syphilis, STI prevention

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Increase in Incidence of Congenital Syphilis

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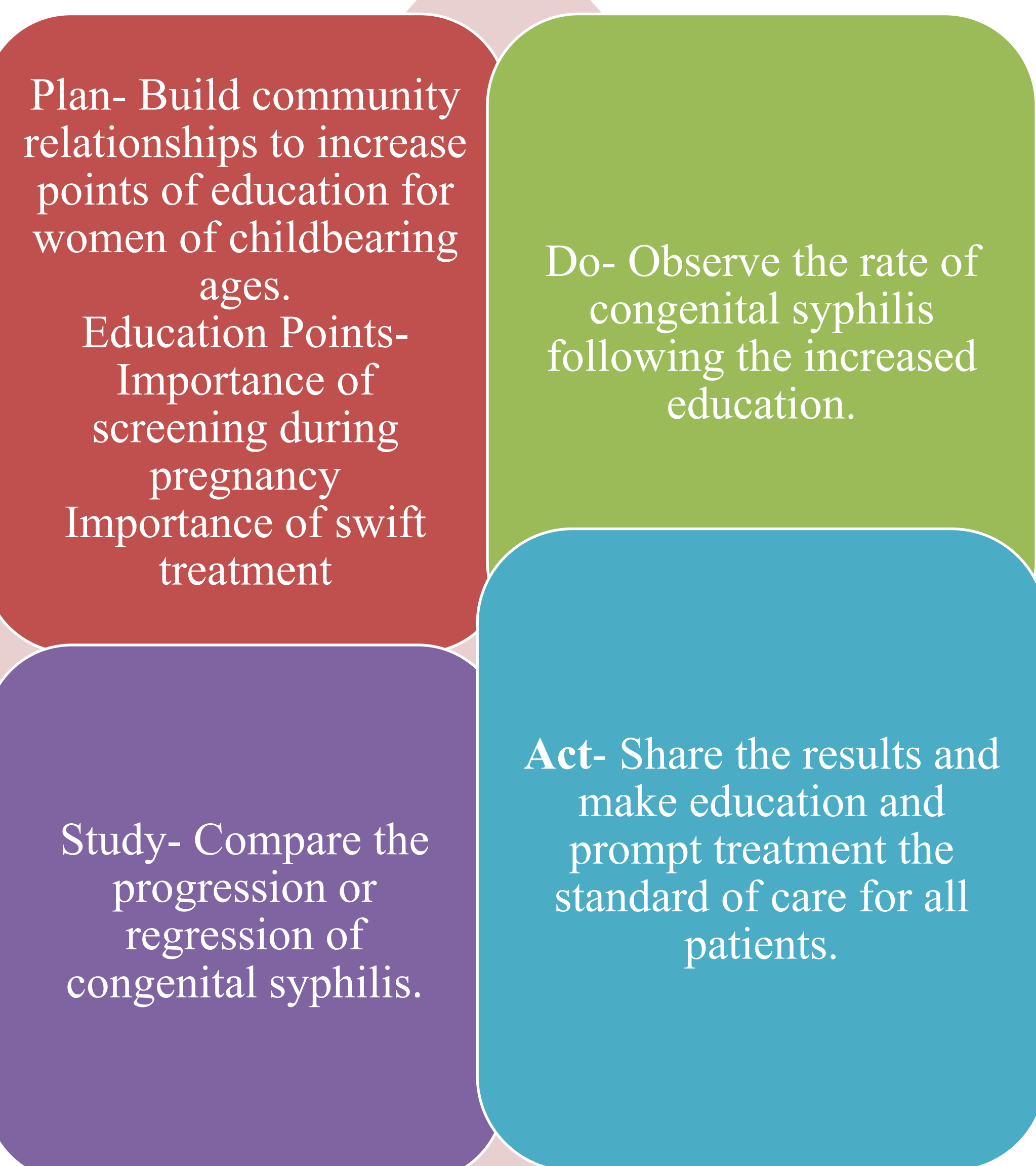
Forward thinking. World ready.

Introduction

Syphilis is caused by the bacterium *Treponema Pallidum* (CDC, 2021). Congenital syphilis occurs when a pregnant mother passes the infection to the child during pregnancy. The incidence of congenital syphilis has increased 254% from 2016 to 2020. This treatable STI is the leading cause of stillbirths and neonatal deaths (Trivedi et al., 2020). Identifying and addressing the need for increased education and access to care is essential in prevention and treatment of syphilis. Education for women of childbearing age as well as proper screening and treatment during pregnancy can make a significant impact on the elimination of congenital syphilis.

Research Design

Plan Do Study Act



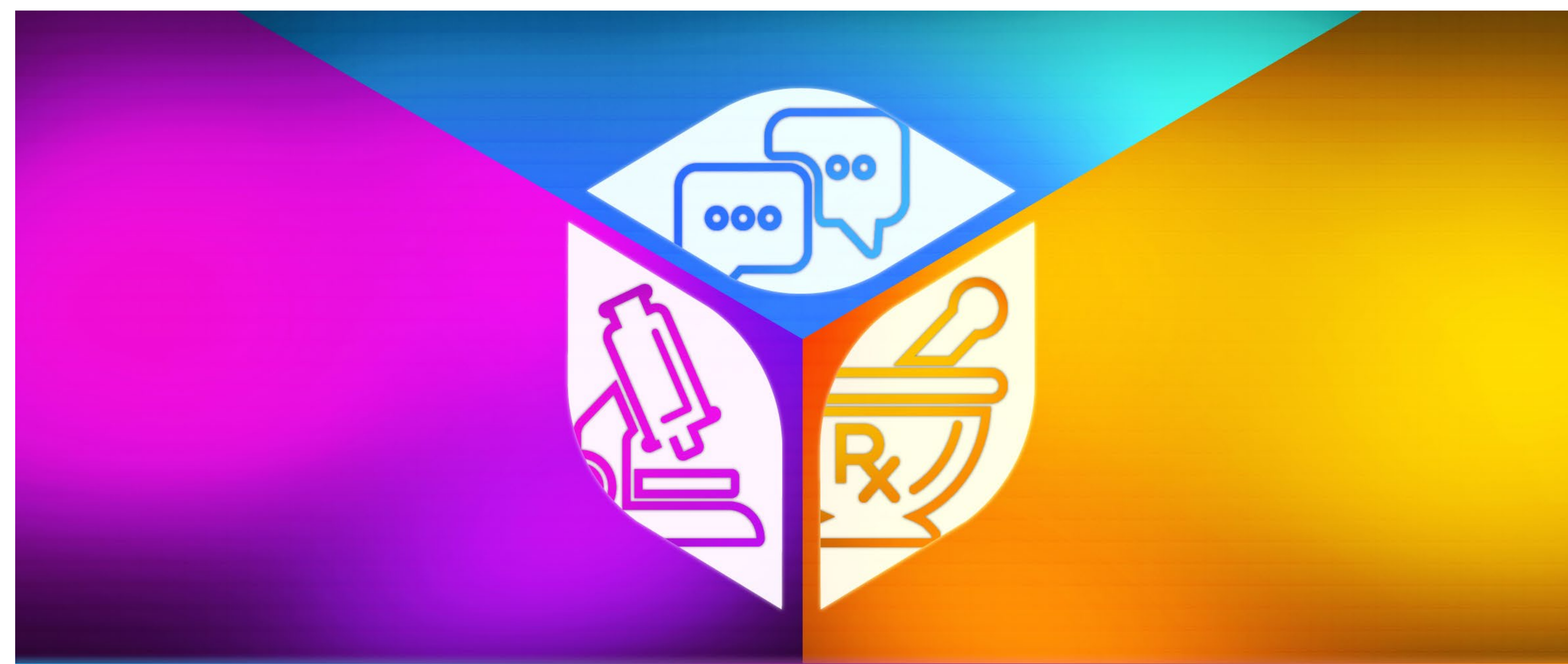
Objective

Build a team with community resources to implement; community centers, rural clinics, health departments and schools.
Target women ages 15 – 35
Implement education during well checks, in health classes, within the community and through the local health department

Methods

Research question: Will increased education and screening aid in decreasing the incidence of congenital syphilis?

- ❖ Community education
- ❖ Increased education at well child checks for STI prevention & screening
- ❖ Completing prenatal screenings
- ❖ Programs to assist low-income areas with screening and treatment
- ❖ Talk about treatment and incidence with patients to decrease the stigma



talk | test | treat

Key Findings

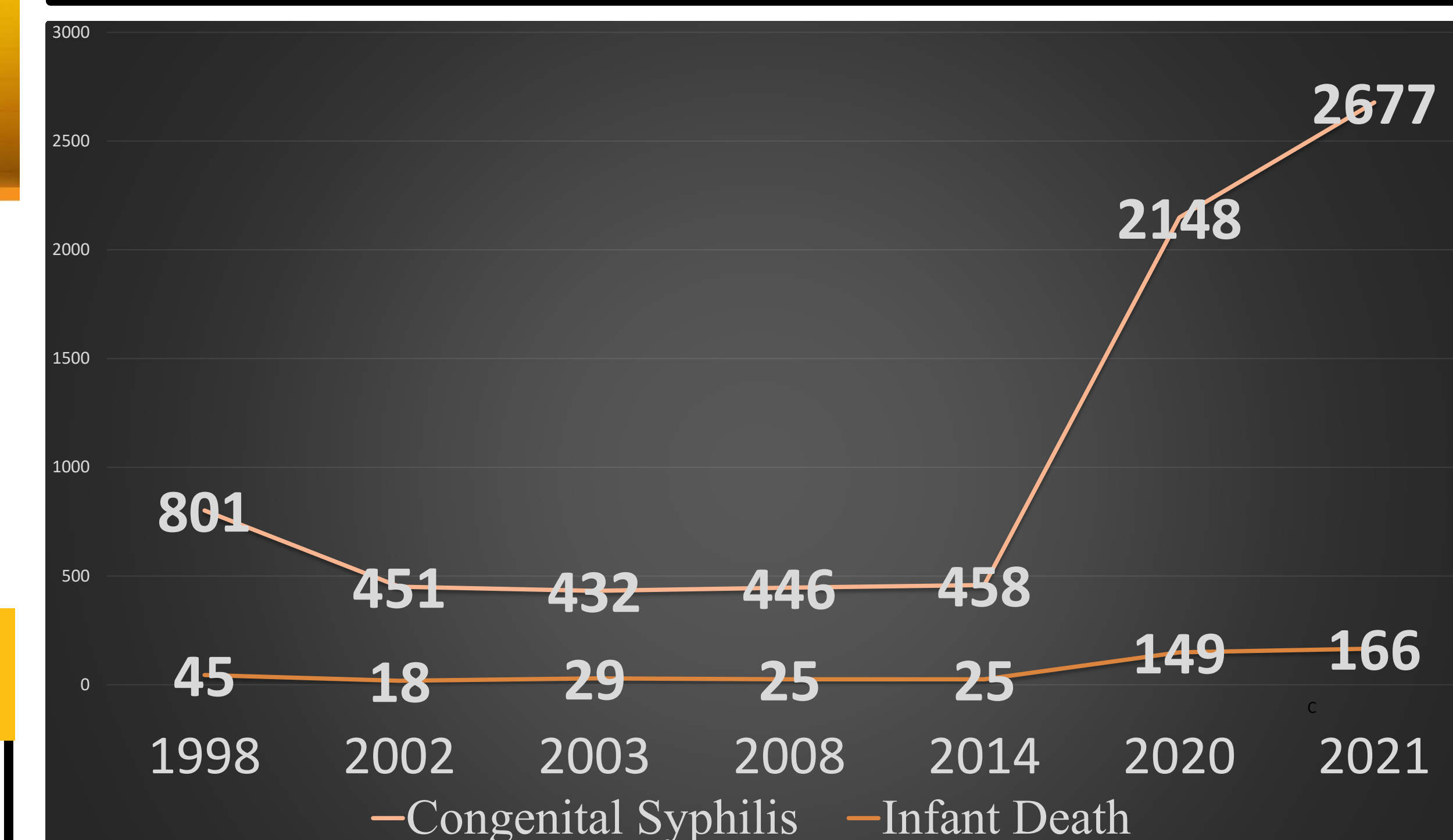
Influencing factors:

- ❖ Funding for sexually transmitted infections and for health departments that provide STI education have decreased over the last decade (Contraceptive Technology Update, 2022).
- ❖ Socioeconomic status plays a significant role in whether patients can seek medical care for screening and treatment of syphilis. Often patient experience barriers such as health insurance limitations, transportation issues, unstable housing or homelessness and economic instability (Harville et al., 2021).
- ❖ Stigma plays a factor as often these women are ashamed of their history and do not feel comfortable speaking with their healthcare providers (Contraceptive Technology Update, 2022).
- ❖ Legal issues can be of issue for those patients that are undocumented migrants, and they fear repercussions for seeking medical care (Contraceptive Technology Update, 2022).

Conclusions

In the last five years the incidence of congenital syphilis has increased significantly, along with infant deaths. The most common themes for congenital syphilis are delayed or inadequate treatment for syphilis in pregnant mothers (Park et al., 2022). To truly make an impact on this population providers, nurses, communities, educators need to work together to decrease the stigma that presents with sexually transmitted disease and increase awareness on resources for evaluation and treatment. In rural areas information for options and importance of treatment should be provided at community centers. Health departments should work with local schools to distribute information and how to seek care. Physical exams for young women should include information for safe sexual practices as well as screening and treatment for infections.

Increased education points can assist with bridging the knowledge gap for this population. Encouraging involvement with communities can help to capture a population that is not seeking care. Finally, talking with patients openly helps to decrease the stigma involved with screening and treatment. **There is a treatment for syphilis and an opportunity to save the lives of infants.**



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