Syphilis Overview
Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease that can cause long-term complications and/or death if not adequately treated. Pregnant women with syphilis can pass the disease to their unborn children and stillbirth may occur.

Where have we been?
In September 2012, the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) declared a syphilis outbreak in Houston/Harris County after observing an 86% increase in the number of Primary and Secondary (P&S) syphilis cases compared to the same time period in 2011. As a result of the syphilis outbreak, the Department implemented the Syphilis Outbreak Response (SOR) Plan.

What have we accomplished?
- Informed the community of the syphilis outbreak through media releases
- Expanded STD clinic hours in HDHHS STD clinics to increase attendance capacity
- Provided syphilis treatment in non-traditional settings including outreach and field settings
- Employed protocols in STD clinics which aids in identifying new syphilis cases faster
- Improved STD intervention activities with community based organizations and private medical providers
- Re-established Mobile STD Clinic to a fully functional mode with clinical and laboratory support
- Initiated a project to provide preventive syphilis to high risk inmates in Harris County Jail
- Developed a community calendar to identify community activities and screening events

Where are we now?
Progress has been made in efforts to reduce infectious syphilis cases through syphilis outbreak response activities:

- The number of cases per month still remains higher than the 2011 average
- The number of cases reported was lower than the average number of cases per month in 2012.
- Threshold alerts have diminished in all subpopulations except MSM 45+ years of age.

What will continue?
- The use of STD clinic protocols including guidance for abbreviated medical assessments
- Syphilis case conferences training between nursing and DIS staff
- STD testing and treatment at community-based venues using licensed vocational nurses and lab tech
- Expanded community-based STD clinical services at CBOs and Federally Qualified Health Centers
- Quarterly data management training for STD clinical staff
- A full serviced Mobile STD Clinic with fully dedicated staff: (Nurse; CMA; Microbiologist II; DIS)
- Community collaboration and mobilization activities