










The U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee

[The U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee Home](#)





The Syphilis Study at Tuskegee Timeline

In 1932, the USPHS, working with the Tuskegee Institute, began a study to record the natural history of syphilis. It was originally called the “Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male” (now referred to as the “USPHS Syphilis Study at Tuskegee”). The study initially involved 600 Black men – 399 with syphilis, 201 who did not have the disease. Participants’ informed consent was not collected. Researchers told the men they were being treated for “bad blood,” a local term used to describe several ailments, including syphilis, anemia, and fatigue. In exchange for taking part in the study, the men received free medical exams, free meals, and burial insurance.


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 1932
 The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) engages the Tuskegee Institute in Macon, AL in the USPHS Tuskegee Syphilis Study.²
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 Mid-1940s
 Penicillin [becomes treatment of choice for syphilis](#), but men in study are not treated.
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 1972
[First news article](#)  about the study.

[The study ends](#) , on recommendation of an Ad Hoc Advisory Panel convened by the Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs.
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 1997
 President Clinton issues a [formal Presidential apology](#)  .

By 1943, penicillin was the treatment of choice for syphilis and [becoming widely available](#), but the participants in the study were not offered treatment.

In 1972, an [Associated Press story](#)  about the study was published. As a result, the Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs appointed an Ad Hoc Advisory Panel to review the study. The advisory panel [concluded](#)   that the study was “ethically unjustified”; that is, the “results [were] disproportionately meager compared with known risks to human subjects involved.” In October 1972, the panel advised stopping the study. A month later, the Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs [announced the end](#)  of the study. In March 1973, the panel also advised the Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) (now known as the Department of Health and Human Services) to instruct the USPHS to provide all necessary medical care for the survivors of the study.¹ The Tuskegee Health Benefit Program (THBP) was established to provide these services. In 1975, participants’ wives, widows and children were added to the program. In 1995, the program was expanded to include health, as well as medical, benefits. The last study participant died in January 2004. The last widow receiving THBP benefits died in January 2009. Participants’ children (10 at present) continue to receive medical and health benefits.

Later in 1973, a class-action lawsuit was filed on behalf of the study participants and their families, resulting in a \$10 million, out-of-court settlement in 1974.

On May 16, 1997, President Bill Clinton issued a [formal Presidential Apology](#)  for the study.



References

¹“HEW News” Office of the Secretary, March 5, 1973; Memorandum “USPHS Study of Untreated Syphilis (the Tuskegee Study; Authority to Treat Participants Upon Termination of the Study,” from Wilmot R Hastings to the secretary, March 5, 1973.

²Vonderlehr, R.A., Clark, T., Wenger, O.C., Heller, J.R., Untreated Syphilis in the Male Negro, Journal of Venereal Disease Information. 17:260-265, (1936).

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Last Reviewed: December 5, 2022