



Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Division of Disease Control

DONALD F. SCHWARZ, MD, MPH
Deputy Mayor, Health & Opportunity
Health Commissioner

NAN FEYLER, JD, MPH
Chief of Staff

CAROLINE C. JOHNSON, MD
Director, Division of Disease Control

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) Awareness Month

April 15, 2008

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has declared that April is STD Awareness Month. The STD Control Program, Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH), is providing this update to raise awareness about selected STD issues especially affecting Philadelphia.

Syphilis

Congenital Syphilis. In 2007, PDPH identified nine cases of congenital syphilis among residents of Philadelphia. This interrupts the downward trend in the number of reported cases of congenital syphilis over the past decade. For the coincident time period, few cases of early syphilis have been reported in women compared to the number of congenital syphilis cases identified. This suggests unrecognized or unreported infection in women. Several of the infants were born to mothers for whom English was not the primary language. These women may have had difficulty accessing prenatal medical services. Additionally, drug use and exchanging sex for drugs or money were risk factors for some of the women delivering infants with congenital syphilis.

MSM Syphilis. Rates of syphilis in Philadelphia among men who have sex with men (MSM) are disproportionately high. In 2007, Philadelphia reported 136 cases of infectious syphilis; 100 of these cases were among men who self-identified as MSM. Among those for whom HIV status was known, 75% (50/83) were HIV positive.

Recommendations for Syphilis Screening. Because of the high rates of syphilis among MSM and the increasing rates of congenital syphilis, PDPH recommends that clinicians be vigilant about performing syphilis screening tests (RPR or VDRL) in the following:

- Women of childbearing age diagnosed with another STD;
- Pregnant women who present to an Emergency Department for any health reason;
- Persons with multiple sexual partners including sex workers or their clients;
- MSMs;
- Pregnant women, in accordance with 28 Pa Code 27.89, which mandates screening in Philadelphia County at the following times:
 - At the first prenatal appointment;
 - At the third trimester of pregnancy;
 - At delivery;
 - At delivery of a still-born.

Chlamydia

Recent national data have shown that approximately 25% of female adolescents are infected with at least one STD. Rates of chlamydia in Philadelphia's adolescents are many times higher than national rates. PDPH recommends annual chlamydia screening for the following:

- All persons aged 15 to 24 years;
- Over the age of 24 years and at high risk (multiple sex partners, other STDs, etc.);
- All pregnant women < 24 years or >24 years and at high risk of infection.

STD Update

PDPH is sponsoring an STD Update on Thursday May 8th at 4:45pm. Topics and presenters include Caroline Johnson, MD (speaking on syphilis epidemiology in Philadelphia), Lenore Asbel, MD (speaking on gonorrhea and chlamydia epidemiology in Philadelphia) and special guest Edward Hook, MD who will speak on syphilis in the HIV patient. Registration is free and CME will be provided. For more information, call 215-557-2101.