



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

April is National STD Awareness Month

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Maxie Fleming
(334) 206-5350

April is National STD Awareness Month, a time for the Alabama Department of Public Health to encourage the public to learn about sexually transmitted diseases and about ways to prevent their spread.

STDs are caused by bacteria, viruses and other microscopic organisms that are spread from person to person during sexual activity and by sharing needles to inject drugs. STDs, including syphilis and gonorrhea, can have serious consequences if left untreated. These include blindness, birth defects, damage to male and female reproductive organs that result in sterility, and other health problems. Women are more susceptible to STD infections, are less likely to experience symptoms than men and are more difficult to diagnose.

"STDs affect as many as one in five adults, and so we stress education as a way to combat them," said Maxie Fleming, director of the STD Division. "Symptoms to watch for vary depending upon the type of infection. If you suspect you may have an STD, seek help right away from your doctor or local health-care clinic."

STDs cannot be acquired from toilet seats, door knobs, water fountains, from lifting heavy objects or from being "unclean." A person can acquire more than one STD at the same time, and there is no vaccine to prevent most STDs. The only exception is Hepatitis B, for which there is a vaccine. No one can build up immunity against STDs, and a person can get them repeatedly.

STDs can be transmitted to sexual partners, and mothers may give the infection to their unborn babies or to their newborns during delivery. Knowing about sexually transmitted diseases can help people avoid contracting them. STDs can be prevented by abstaining from sex and by having a sexual relationship with only one sex partner who is also not infected. Using a condom during sexual activity greatly lowers a person's risk of acquiring an STD.

Many STDs place the infected person at high risk for HIV/AIDS, the most serious sexually transmitted disease. The HIV virus which causes AIDS can be given to sexual and/or needle-sharing partners, and HIV may also be passed from mothers to their babies by breastfeeding. Sexual and/or needle sharing partners should be notified and informed about the possibility of infection. A total of 13,770 HIV/AIDS cases have been reported in Alabama, and more than 3,600 state residents have died from AIDS.

Bacterial STDs can be treated and cured but are often undetected. The most common STD is caused by chlamydia. Chlamydia is a treatable bacterial infection that can scar the fallopian tubes and so affect a woman's ability to have children. More than 14,000 cases of chlamydia were reported in Alabama during 2003. Because chlamydia has no symptoms in 75 percent of cases among women and in 25 percent of cases among men, it has become the most rapidly advancing STD.

Gonorrhea, also asymptomatic-in many cases, accounts for 1.1 million new infections annually in the U.S. There were more than 9,000 cases of gonorrhea in Alabama in 2003. If untreated, chlamydia and gonorrhea are particularly destructive to women, causing pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility and ectopic or tubal pregnancies.

Viral STDs, for which there is currently no cure, have a lifelong impact on physical and emotional health. An estimated 40 million Americans have genital herpes and 40 million have human papillomavirus (HPV), the cause of genital warts. Some strains of HPV are associated with cervical cancer.

Most STDs respond well to treatment, but STDs will not go away if ignored. Get medical help as soon as possible. To avoid reinfection, make sure to follow all instructions including taking medication and returning for follow-up examinations. Make sure to avoid sexual activity until treatment is completed, and make sure all sex partners have completed treatment before resuming sexual activity.

Remember to follow behaviors that lower the likelihood of being exposed to an STD, such as abstinence; mutual monogamy with an uninfected sexual partner; and consistent and correct use of condoms.

For more information visit the Alabama Department of Public Health Web site at www.adph.org. Under A-Z contents click on STDs to view fact sheets. Or you may call the National STD and AIDS Hotline at 800-227-8922 or 800-342-2437. The Spanish language hotline number is 800-344-7432 and the TTY line for the hearing impaired is 800-243-7889. These toll-free lines are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

4/8/04