



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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STD rates in Alabama among highest in nation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released its 2006 Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance report showing Alabama among the highest states in the nation for rates of syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia. The state ranks second highest in the rate of syphilis, fourth in gonorrhea and fifth in chlamydia.

Dr. Charles Woernle, assistant state health officer for disease control and prevention, said, "The data serve as a reminder that sexually transmitted diseases pose a serious and ongoing health threat to millions of Americans. Nearly 19 million new cases occur in the United States each year, affecting Americans of all ages and in all walks of life."

Chlamydia, gonorrhea, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and syphilis are the most frequently reported STDs within Alabama. The state's positivity rate by age is consistent with national disease trends. The age group most affected by chlamydia and gonorrhea is 15 to 19-year-olds, followed by 20 to 24-year-olds. The rate appears to decline after 25 years of age, a pattern that has remained consistent throughout the past five years.

STDs severely impact multiple groups, especially women and men who have sex with men. Many sexually active individuals are infected without knowing it and then transmit the infections to their partners. Women frequently do not experience any symptoms of chlamydia, the most commonly reported bacterial STD, and some men do not, so it often goes unnoticed. When it is undetected and untreated, chlamydia can cause serious consequences such as pelvic pain and infertility. Chlamydia testing is recommended for women under age 26, women who are pregnant, or women who have new or multiple partners.

Although the incidence of syphilis is on a downward trend nationwide, Alabama continues to experience a high rate of early syphilis cases. Special emphasis is placed on early cases because that is when the infection is easily transmitted. During 2006, Jefferson County, which includes Birmingham, the state's most populous city, reported the majority of reported cases with 238, almost three times the number reported the previous year, giving it the highest ranking in the country for rates per 100,000. Reported risk factors have been fairly consistent: drug use and exchanging sex for drugs or money.

The Alabama Department of Public Health's Division of STD Prevention and Control is charged with identifying populations at increased risk for infection in order to reduce their chances of developing an STD, transmitting it to others, or developing related complications. Disease intervention personnel provide screening, diagnostic services, education, treatment, partner notification, and referral services in every county of Alabama.

In the fall of 2005, the state Bureau of Clinical Laboratories acquired the technology to utilize urine-based testing for chlamydia and gonorrhea, and the testing has been implemented for routine screening in all state public health clinics. Using the amplified test has expanded the availability of specimen collection, making it easier and less time-consuming, and has dramatically increased the number of individuals tested, particularly among males. The sensitivity of the test has also resulted in the diagnosis and treatment of more infections.

Alabamians are encouraged to talk with their partners and health care providers about STDs and sexual health, even if they have no signs or symptoms. For more information about sexually transmitted diseases, including statistics for Alabama, check out the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at <http://adph.org/std>