



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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“GET YOURSELF TESTED” TO REDUCE BURDEN OF SEXUAL DISEASE IN TENNESSEE

April is STD Awareness Month

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Tennessee ranks 11th in the nation for reported cases of sexually transmitted diseases. The Department of Health is working to educate Tennesseans on ways to reduce the burden of these preventable infections during STD Awareness Month this April. The goal of this annual health observance is to raise awareness about the impact of STDs and the importance of preventing, testing for and treating these diseases.

“People don’t like to talk about these diseases, but they will not go away if we ignore them,” said Health Commissioner Susan R. Cooper, MSN, RN. “We urge Tennesseans to learn how to prevent sexually transmitted infections and to talk to their health providers to learn if they are at risk.”

The “GYT-Get Yourself Tested” campaign is the primary focus of national STD Awareness Month activities this year, urging people to get tested for STDs. GYT also stands for “Get Yourself Talking,” an element of the campaign targeting young people who may be uncomfortable or uncertain about asking medical providers for sexual health services or talking to their partners or friends about testing.

Of the 50 states, Tennessee ranks 11th for numbers of cases of Chlamydia, sixth for syphilis, 12th for gonorrhea and 17th for HIV/AIDS. Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control statistics show young people are particularly at risk:

- Almost half of new STD cases each year are among people age 15 to 24
- Girls age 15 to 19 accounted for the largest number of chlamydia and gonorrhea cases in 2008
- The highest rates of gonorrhea are among females age 15 to 24

These infections can lead to other serious health problems. Chlamydia and gonorrhea, the most commonly reported infectious diseases in the United States, are among the most serious threats to women’s fertility. Untreated, these illnesses can cause pelvic inflammatory disease which can lead to permanent damage to internal organs and tissues, chronic pelvic pain, infertility and potentially fatal ectopic pregnancy. Untreated syphilis can cause cardiovascular and neurological problems that lead to disability or death, and can be passed from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy. Being infected with an STD also increases the risk of contracting HIV.

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Antibiotic resistant gonorrhea is another serious public health concern. Currently, most cases of gonorrhea are easy to treat. However, there is only one remaining class of antibiotics recommended as treatment. The bacteria that cause gonorrhea develop resistance to antibiotics easily. In the Far East, persons are already being seen with gonorrhea that is resistant to current treatments. It is estimated that in seven years if no other class of antibiotics is developed, antibiotic-resistant gonorrhea will be the norm rather than the exception.

“The best way to reduce the burden of STDs in Tennessee is for those who are sexually active to take responsibility for their personal health,” said Jeaneece Seals, director of the Department of Health’s HIV/AIDS/STD Section. “Abstinence and monogamy are the most reliable ways to avoid infection. Condom use also reduces the risk of infection, and immunizations are available for hepatitis B and HPV. It is also important for those who are sexually active to follow recommendations for testing for STDs.”

STD screening and early diagnoses are vital to prevent serious health consequences and increased transmission. Screening is particularly important since many STDs often have no signs or symptoms, particularly among women. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends annual Chlamydia screening for sexually active women under the age of 26. CDC also recommends that girls and women between the ages of 11 and 26 be fully vaccinated against HPV, or human papillomavirus. For sexually active men who have sex with men, CDC recommends annual HIV and syphilis blood testing, and annual testing for Chlamydia and gonorrhea, with more frequent testing for men who engage in high-risk behavior.

Tennessee’s county health departments offer confidential testing for and treatment of STDs. A list of county health department clinics can be found online at <http://health.state.tn.us/localdepartments.htm>, or by calling the toll-free Tennessee Anytime Help Desk at 1-866-8TN-EGOV. Individuals can also find an STD testing site near them by entering their ZIP code at <http://hivtest.org/>, or sending a text with their ZIP code to “KNOWIT” (566948) to receive a reply text with information about a nearby testing site.

The GYT (Get Yourself Tested) campaign is a partnership between MTV Networks, the Kaiser Family Foundation, Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the CDC. To learn more about the GYT campaign and STD prevention, visit the Web at <http://www.gytnow.org>.

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Media note: To get county and regional level data on STDs in Tennessee, visit the Department of Health Web site at <http://health.state.tn.us/statistics/std.htm>.

This news release can be accessed online at <http://news.tennesseeanytime.org/taxonomy/term/30>.