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Press Release

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Sexually transmitted diseases infect thousands of Alaskans, state reports *April is STD Awareness Month*

(Anchorage, AK) —Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) continue to infect thousands of Alaskans and infect some residents at higher rates than others, according to two new reports from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

About 19 million new sexually transmitted infections are reported every year in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC has designated April as STD Awareness Month.

In Alaska and nationwide, chlamydia cases have comprised the largest proportion of all reportable STDs. From 2000 through 2007, the most recent years for which national ranking data are available, Alaska has had the first- or second-highest chlamydia infection rate nationwide. In 2008, Alaska had a chlamydia rate of 718 cases per 100,000 people. Although gonorrhea is not as prevalent in Alaska as chlamydia, the health consequences are similar. There have been approximately 600 cases of gonorrhea in Alaska each year since 2002.

According to the Alaska Section of Epidemiology *Bulletin* articles, the 2008 chlamydia rate among Alaska Natives (2,018 cases per 100,000 people) was six times higher than the rate for white Alaskans (322 cases per 100,000). Young women ages 15 to 24 have the highest rate of chlamydia infection. In women, chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease — a cause of infertility, ectopic pregnancy and chronic pelvic pain. Chlamydia can be asymptomatic, meaning people who have it may be unaware they are infected.

Mollie Rosier, the Division of Public Health's HIV/STD program manager, said the annual number of newly reported chlamydia cases has been significantly increasing during the past decade, but it is not possible to determine how much of that increase is due to a real increase in chlamydia cases or to additional screening for the bacteria with new, more sensitive tests.

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Rosier said there are effective ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat STDs. In most public health clinics across the state, people can submit a urine specimen to be tested for gonorrhea and chlamydia infections. Rosier said antibiotics can easily cure both diseases. Screening for STDs and early diagnosis can prevent serious health consequences and transmission. The CDC recommends annual chlamydia screening for sexually active women ages 25 and younger and all pregnant females. Men having sex with men should have yearly HIV and syphilis blood tests, as well as chlamydia and gonorrhea tests, according to the CDC.

“If you are sexually active, the best way to reduce the risk of transmission of gonorrhea and chlamydia infection is to use latex condoms, consistently and correctly, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner,” Rosier said.

The department convenes a meeting of the Anchorage HIV/STD Advisory Committee quarterly. The committee monitors HIV and STD trends and the impact of the diseases on Alaska, as well as efforts to reduce the number of infections. Other committee members include the Alaska Department of Corrections, Elmendorf Air Force Base, Fort Richardson Army Base, the Municipality of Anchorage Reproductive Health Clinic, Southcentral Foundation, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest.

More information about STDs is available at: [EPI Bulletins on STDs](#), [Alaska HIV/STD Program](#), and [CDC STD Fact Sheets](#)

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