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Press Release

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Alaska sees spike in gonorrhea

Mild symptoms may result in fewer patients seeking treatment and spreading infection

(Anchorage, AK) — A large increase in reported gonorrhea cases in Alaska in 2009 has prompted state health officials to issue a Bulletin that describes the epidemic and provides disease control recommendations for health-care providers and other health partners.

According to the Bulletin published today by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Section of Epidemiology, 997 cases of genital *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* infection were reported in Alaska in 2009, representing a 69 percent increase in the gonorrhea infection rate compared to 2008.

“This is the biggest single-year increase in gonorrhea cases in Alaska since the 1970s,” said Susan Jones, manager of the section’s HIV/STD program. “The increase occurred in both sexes, among all races, in all age groups, and in all regions except the Interior.” The Alaska Native population is being disproportionately affected by this outbreak; 68 percent of all reported cases were among Alaska Native people.

“It’s important to note that the symptoms of gonorrhea can be mild for some patients, so many people may not even know they have gonorrhea — a leading cause of infertility in women” said Dr. Joe McLaughlin, Alaska State Epidemiologist. “Therefore, providers should screen sexually active women younger than 25 years of age, those with multiple or new sex partners, those who have had gonorrhea or chlamydia infection in the past 12 months, and those who have been told they were exposed to gonorrhea.” All people who know they are infected are being encouraged to notify their providers and their sexual partners so that all partners can be tested and treated.

To find a place in your community to get tested, call the local public health nursing center, family planning or Planned Parenthood Center, the Alaska Native Regional Health Corporation in your area, or go to the web site at <https://www.iknowmine.org>.

A complete copy of the report is available at <http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/default.jsp>.

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