



Protecting, maintaining and improving the health of all Minnesotans

September 27, 2010

Dear Colleague:

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) would like to alert you to a **31 percent increase in new syphilis cases** for 2010 compared to the same time period last year. As of mid-September 2010, MDH preliminary data is showing that the number of early syphilis (primary, secondary, and early latent) cases reported to date is already equal to the number of cases received in all of 2009. The majority of these cases (75 of 118) have been reported since June 1st of this year.

As in past years, the socio-demographic pattern among the cases continues to be very similar. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the cases are among males, and most of these cases (77%) report male to male sex. In terms of behavioral patterns, anonymous sex, use of internet chat rooms, and no or infrequent condom use continue to be ongoing commonalities among newly diagnosed cases.

In addition, there is continued concern about the high levels of syphilis and HIV co-infection (47 % in the total cases reported, and 57% among men who have sex with men) and the difficulty of identifying and alerting the sexual partners of these cases of their potential exposure to both HIV and syphilis.

Based on this data, the MDH's recommendations for assessing the risk for male patients are as follows:

- **Complete sexual history to determine if your male patients have sex with men (MSM)**
- **Test MSM for syphilis at least annually and as often as every three months for those at highest risk**
- **Become familiar with syphilis signs and symptoms and differential diagnosis:**
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/syphilis/eliminationproject/diagnosis.html>
- **Ask for the names of the patient's sexual partners so they can be notified of potential exposure**
- **Screen for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as chlamydia and gonorrhea in all relevant anatomic sites**
- **Promote the use of latex condoms among those who are sexually active**
- **Provide to all MSM patients and to STD patients the enclosed syphilis brochure that can be downloaded at:**
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/syphilis/eliminationproject/syphilisbrochure.pdf>

The MDH will continue to provide its public awareness efforts through the Stop Syph MN campaign: <http://www.StopSyphMN.com>. The MDH will also continue its community-based syphilis Internet and outreach program contract with the Hennepin County Public Health Clinic. The MDH will be hosting syphilis and HIV co-infection training for clinicians on October 6th (see enclosed flyer for details).

For downloadable online resources, the MDH web site offers materials that can help clinicians do sexual histories, diagnose and treat cases, and counsel their patients on prevention at: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/sep>. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) treatment guidelines for syphilis can be found online at <http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/>.

For more information, contact Peter Carr at peter.carr@state.mn.us or by calling 651-201-4007. Thank you for all you do for the health of our community!

Sincerely,

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