



Protecting, maintaining and improving the health of all Minnesotans

February 5, 2009

Dear Colleague:

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) would like to alert you to an **increase in new syphilis cases** for 2008. The number of early syphilis (primary, secondary, and early latent) cases **is up 40 percent** compared to 2007. While the number of cases increased between 2006 and 2007, this increase is significantly larger. The largest increase is in the number of primary cases (46 cases in 2008 vs. 21 in 2007), which indicates that cases are being caught earlier, a positive sign. This increase parallels similar increases seen in other areas of the country.

Ninety-seven (97) percent of the cases are among males, and most of these cases (85%) report male to male sex. Of particular concern is a significant increase in cases among adolescents and young adults (ages 15 to 24 years of age), as well as, the continued high levels of co-infection (40%) with HIV. In terms of behavioral patterns, anonymous sex, use of internet chat rooms, and no or infrequent condom use continue to be an issue among newly diagnosed cases.

Based on these numbers, MDH is reiterating its recommendation that men who have sex with men (MSM) be tested for syphilis at least annually. For those at highest risk with multiple partners, especially if they are HIV positive, MDH recommends testing as often as every three months.

For those diagnosed with syphilis, the MDH recommends that their sexual partners be tested and treated in accordance with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. The treatment guidelines can be found online at <http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/>.

The MDH web site, www.health.state.mn.us/sep, offers materials that can help clinicians do sexual histories, diagnose and treat cases, and counsel their patients on prevention:

Syphilis diagnosis and treatment information:

- Syphilis clinical protocol
- Physician's pocket card
- Aid to Diagnosis photo resource
- STD statistics

Sexual health resources:

- Sexual health risk assessment tool
- Guide for integrated risk assessment

Information about serving MSM:

- Informational materials
- Lobby posters

Patient materials:

- Brochures
- A link to inSPOT
- Partner self-referral cards

For more information, contact Peter Carr at peter.carr@state.mn.us or by calling 651-201-4032.

Thank you for all you do for the health of our community!

Sincerely,

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