

40% Increase in Early Syphilis Cases in Minnesota in 2008:

CURRENT SITUATION

Preliminary data indicate 158 newly diagnosed cases in 2008. This represents a **forty percent** increase from 2007, and it continues the pattern observed over the past few years. Of significance in the 2008 cases:

- 23% were between 18 and 24 years of age;
- 97% of the cases are among males, which 85% were among men who have sex with men (MSM);
- Over 40% were co-infected with HIV;
- Majority were diagnosed during the primary or secondary stages of the disease; and,
- Internet chat rooms, anonymous sex, and no or infrequent condom use were common risks.

PREVENTION MESSAGES TO CLIENTS

- Clients using the internet to meet partners should understand they are putting themselves at higher risk of infection
- Latex condoms used properly can help prevent transmission of both syphilis and HIV
- Clients should discuss their sexual histories and ways to reduce their risks with their new partners

SEXUAL PARTNERS NEED TO BE TESTED

It's important that all sexual partners of infected men be tested and treated appropriately. Untreated partners may continue to unknowingly infect others and can suffer consequences from lack of treatment. Here are some suggested strategies:

- Include syphilis information and testing opportunities during outreach at public sex locations, bars, hangouts and other venues where MSM meet their sexual partners. Include syphilis information within your programs, events, exhibits and forums;
- Provide messages on the Internet chat rooms and phone sex lines that persons at risk can get infected with syphilis more than once and that their sexual partners need to be tested and treated; and,
- Inform your clients with syphilis that the MDH Partner Services Program can help them discreetly and confidentially notify their partners. Call (651) 201-5414 for assistance.

Remind clients with syphilis about the importance of notifying their sexual partners about the need for testing and treatment

TESTING AND SCREENING FOR SYPHILIS

- Sexually active MSM and their sexual partners should be screened for syphilis every year. Those at highest risk (e.g., meeting partners via internet, multiple or anonymous partners) should be screened every 3-6 months;
- If clients and their sexual partners wish to be tested, refer them to their own health care provider or to the: **Hennepin County Public Health Clinic**, 525 Portland Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55415, (612) 543-5555; or, **Room 111**, 555 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101, (651) 266-1352; and,
- Let your clients know they can call the **Minnesota Family Planning and STD Hotline** about syphilis, testing locations, and other STDs at 1-800-78-FACTS voice/TTY. They may contact the **MAP AIDSLine** about HIV and available prevention programs for MSM at (612) 373-AIDS, (612) 373-2465 TTY, (800) 248-AIDS, (888) 820-2437 TTY or <http://www.mnaimsproject.org/aidslines/index.htm>.

If your program would like to learn more about syphilis or MDH Partner Services Program, Contact Steve Schletty at (651) 201-5414; or by e-mail at: stephen.schletty@state.mn.us.

If you need any other materials about syphilis, you may call the STD and HIV Section, MDH, at (651) 201-5414. Syphilis resources and tool kit are available online at: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/sep>.

Examples of graphic symptoms of syphilis can be found online at: <http://phil.cdc.gov/phil/home.asp> or <http://www.cdc.gov/std/training/clinicalslides/>.

See the CDC guidelines for assessing and screening MSM for STDs at: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/see>.