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TO: STD Program Administrators
FROM: Lesli Choat - STD Counseling and Testing Coordinator
DATE: August 7, 2017
RE: Increasing Early Syphilis Cases in Illinois

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Section has created an educational/informational series of releases to address the rise in syphilis in Illinois. This is one of several projects the STD Section is formulating to address the alarming increase in all STDs both nationally and in our state. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released similar information that is cited in the Illinois information documents.

The press release that accompanied the CDC 2015 STD Surveillance Report stated, “Total combined cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis reported in 2015 reached the highest number ever”. Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis are curable with antibiotics combined with widespread access to screening and treatment, this should reduce their spread. Most STD cases continue to go undiagnosed and untreated, putting individuals at risk for severe and often irreversible health consequences; including infertility, chronic pain, and increased risk for HIV. STDs also impose a substantial economic burden: CDC estimates STD cases cost the U.S. healthcare system nearly \$16 billion each year.¹

In 2016, there were 72,201 chlamydia cases, 21,199 gonorrhea cases, and 2,398 early syphilis cases. The rates per 100,000 population were 562.7 for chlamydia, 165.2 for gonorrhea, and 18.7 for early syphilis.

Below are the percent increases in cases from the 2016 data:

- Chlamydia cases had a 4% increase from 2015
- Gonorrhea cases had a 24% increase from 2015
- Early Syphilis cases had a 21% increase from 2015

In the past five years (2012-2016):

- Chlamydia had a 7% rate increase
- Gonorrhea had a 17% rate increase
- **Early Syphilis had a 60% rate increase**

It is imperative that we screen for syphilis and treat not only those infected but also their sex partners to stop this dramatic rise in syphilis cases in Illinois. Education for all health care providers is key to reducing new syphilis infections.



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The syphilis series will consist of three parts with part one (sent 7/6/17) covering syphilis staging and treatment and including information about alternate treatment options during the current bicillin shortage. Part two (attached here) covers general syphilis information, data, screening recommendations, and reporting. Part three (to follow) will cover the complex syphilis lab results, interpretation, and corresponding action.

Please share these informational pieces with your colleagues and association members to help make as many health care providers as possible aware of the current rise in syphilis in Illinois. The subsequent and final part of this syphilis series is planned to be sent September of 2017.

The IDPH STD Section appreciates your commitment to maintaining and promoting the health of all the people that live in Illinois. With your help, we believe that through education and outreach Illinois can reduce the new cases of STDs. For any questions or assistance please contact the STD Section at 217-782-2747.

1 CDC Reported STDs at Unprecedented High in the U.S. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/2016/std-surveillance-report-2015-press-release.html>