Sexually Transmitted Infections on the Rise in Santa Barbara County - Talk, Test, and Treat

Nearly 20 million new sexually transmitted infections occur in the United States every year costing the American healthcare system nearly $16 billion in direct medical costs alone, as reported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). America’s youth shoulder a substantial burden of these infections. CDC estimates that half of all new STDs in the country occur among young men and women aged 15 to 24.

In observance of Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Awareness month occurring every April, the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department is encouraging our community to take three simple actions: Talk, Test, and Treat. The high incidence of sexually transmitted infections suggests that many Americans are at risk of exposure to STDs, underscoring the need for prevention. Despite this news, there are effective ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat these diseases. Screening and early diagnoses are essential in preventing transmission and the long term health consequences of STDs.

In 2014, Santa Barbara County STD rates show a steady increase with a chlamydia rate of 461.4 per 100,000 population compared to California’s 453.4, and gonorrhea cases nearly doubled with 203 new cases reported with a case rate of 46.5. Of particular concern locally are the increasing numbers of primary and secondary syphilis cases and congenital syphilis. In 2014 there were 23 cases of syphilis with a case rate of 5.3 reported compared to 9 cases in 2012. These alarming data suggest that more needs to be done to prevent the spread by ensuring comprehensive STD screening, testing, and treatment.

Abstaining from sex, reducing the number of sexual partners, and consistently and correctly using condoms are all effective prevention strategies. Safe, effective vaccines are also available to prevent hepatitis B and some types of the human papillomavirus (HPV) that cause disease and cancer. And for all individuals who are sexually active – particularly young people – STD screening and prompt treatment (if infected) are critical to protect a person’s health and prevent transmission to others.

More information about STDs is available at www.sbcphd.org/dcp or www.cdc.gov/std.