

A Publication of the Genesee County Health Department Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) continue to be a major public health problem across the United States. Every year it is estimated that there are 19 million new infections and over half of them occur in people aged 15 to 24 years old.¹ Annually, the direct medical costs of STDs in the United States are \$13 billion.¹ Consequently, STDs have been termed the 'hidden epidemic' as their rates continue to rise in contrast to other communicable diseases. Michigan and Genesee County are not exceptions from these trends. Michigan ranks among the top ten states with the highest occurrence of STDs in the United States. Within Michigan, these rates are driven by a handful of high incidence counties including Wayne, Oakland, Genesee, and Kent counties.

Originally, the term 'venereal disease' was used to refer to diseases transmitted through sexual contact. It was specific to five illnesses that are all bacterial in nature and curable with antibiotics. Extremely high incidences of these diseases were seen during the World War II era, but declined because of simple treatments with antibiotics and public health campaigns. Awareness of viral STDs began in the 1980s with recognition of diseases such as herpes and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Today the term sexually transmitted disease refers to over 50 etiologies including those that are bacterial, viral, and parasitic in nature. Many STDs can cause serious and long-term complications like infertility and cancer. Others cause chronic and incurable infections, and some of these, such as HIV, are fatal. Currently, there are nine STDs listed on Michigan's reportable disease list and are required by law to be reported to local health departments. These are HIV, hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV), granuloma inguinale, and chancroid.

Two STDs, chlamydia and gonorrhea, top the list of most reported diseases. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that there are

3 million new chlamydia infections each year and 650,000 new gonorrhea infections. Nonetheless, both these diseases are believed to be considerably under-diagnosed and under-reported. This is in part because the majority of those who are at highest risk, people aged 18-44, have never been tested for any STD other than HIV.² As a result, it is thought there are up to twice as many gonorrhea and chlamydia infections occurring throughout the United States.¹

In 2005, Genesee County's chlamydia rate was the 2nd highest in Michigan, with 607 cases per 100,000 people, and the rate of gonorrhea was Michigan's 3rd highest at 342 cases per 100,000. Similar to the rest of the United States, in Genesee County young females carry the burden of these infections. The distribution of chlamydia and gonorrhea case rates by age and gender for 2005 can be seen in the figures on the next page. Currently, women in Genesee County account for 3.6 times as many chlamydia cases as men. Overall, gonorrhea infection rates are only slightly higher in women versus men, but the distribution across age groups for both infections is disproportionately larger in females aged 15-24 years old.

Women are more biologically susceptible than men to STD infections and this may, in part, explain this gender disparity. In addition, women are more vulnerable to these STDs because they are more likely to have asymptomatic infections which can result in severe or long-lasting sequelae. Increased awareness of these long-term effects has aided the effort to enhance screening for

The purpose of this quarterly newsletter is to inform the community and health care providers in Genesee County about disease trends in the county. We welcome any comments or questions. Contact:

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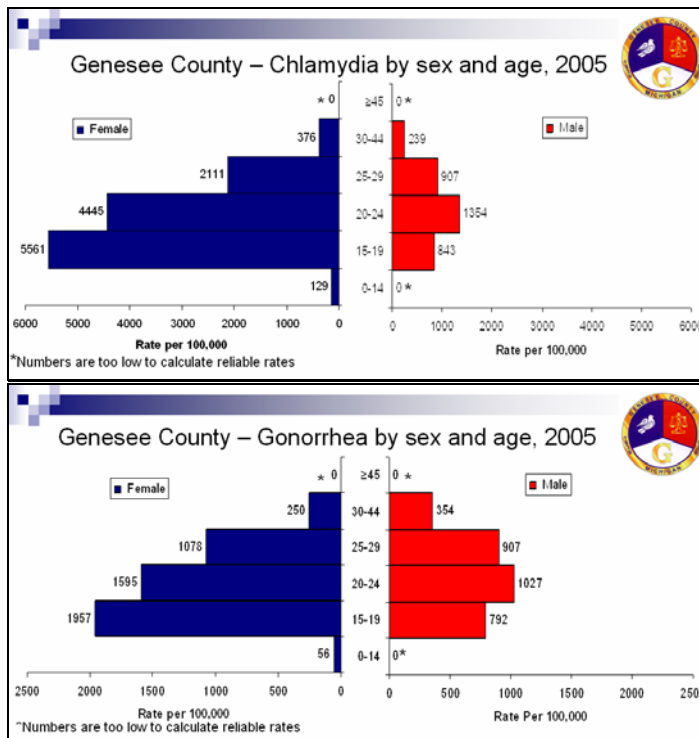
¹CDC- Trends in Reportable STDs in the US, 2004

²American Social Health Association – STD/STI Facts

STDs, particularly in women, such as through family planning clinics. Screening efforts are still lacking, though, because many sexually active women are not being tested. To improve screening, the CDC has now recommended annual chlamydia testing of sexually active women under age 26, and studies have shown screening can be increased if chlamydia testing is coupled with annual Pap tests.¹ Testing and treating men for STDs may also aid in lowering STD transmission to women.

Substantial disparities are seen between races in Genesee County. Chlamydia rates are 7.5 times higher in African Americans as in Whites while gonorrhea rates are 15 times higher. The extent of the differences between races may not be accurate, though, because as much as 60-70% of STD data is missing race/ethnicity information. True STD rates for other racial groups in Genesee County are not known because reporting of those races is negligible. Furthermore, race reporting is not equally distributed among public and private institutions. Reporting is more complete from the public sector than from private providers. This makes these trends more representative of populations who are served by public clinics. Women, who are heavily burdened by STDs, utilize private providers more often than men, thus the missing race data from this large population may further bias the data. None of this is unique to Genesee County. Similar percentages and distributions of incomplete race reporting are seen across the nation as well as similar racial disparities.

In 2005, for the first time since the year 2000, Genesee County saw a reduction in both gonorrhea and chlamydia rates from the previous year. The



first step in maintaining this decline is to target interventions to those who are at high risk of contracting STDs. In order to accurately define these risk groups and guide these public health efforts, health care providers must provide complete and timely STD reporting. This involves ensuring that those who report, for instance, laboratories, are given all the information that needs to be submitted in the reporting form. Continued and precise surveillance will also allow awareness of the true impact of STDs and further knowledge of their risk factors.

Selected Reportable Communicable Diseases in Genesee County

Disease	Week ending 07/08/06	Reported cases to date FY* 2005-06	Same week - Reported cases to date FY 2004-05	Total reported cases FY 2004-05
Chicken Pox	0	143	429	443
Pertussis	0	4	2	4
Flu-like illness	0	33,153	39,797	41,331
TB-New cases	0	1	4	4
Chlamydia	30	2,453	2,241	2,515
Gonorrhea	20	1,286	1,502	1,664
Hepatitis B (Acute)	0	5	9	13
Hepatitis C (Acute)	0	4	3	3
Campylobacter	1	9	10	11
Giardiasis	0	10	7	11
Hepatitis A	0	4	8	16
Salmonellosis	1	20	17	28
Shigellosis	0	3	0	0
Meningitis-Viral	2	46	55	84
Meningitis-Bacterial	0	8	6	6

*FY – Fiscal Year, October 1-September 30

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