



Vermont Department of Health Promoting Awareness of Syphilis due to Rise in Cases

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BURLINGTON – The Vermont Department of Health is promoting awareness of syphilis following a large increase in the number of cases of this disease.

Nine cases of syphilis were reported in 2007. This compares to three cases in 2006 and an average of zero to one cases in prior years. Almost all of the cases have occurred among men who have sex with men (MSM).

“This increase in the number of cases of syphilis among MSM reflects a national trend,” said State Epidemiologist Cort Lohff, MD. “Despite dramatic declines in the number of cases of syphilis throughout the 1990s, the number of cases has increased over the last several years. Much of this can be attributed to a rise in cases among MSM.”

Syphilis first appears as a painless sore (called a chancre). Syphilis can be passed onto others during sex. In many cases, the sores may not be noticed. As a result, transmission often occurs from persons who are not aware they are infected. If left untreated, a rash and swollen lymph nodes, along with other symptoms, such as headache, fever, sore throat, and fatigue, may follow.

Because many people who have syphilis lack evidence of infection, anyone who is at risk should be periodically tested, even in the absence of symptoms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends an annual syphilis test for all sexually active MSM, in addition to routine screening for other sexually transmitted diseases and HIV.

Syphilis can be easily treated if identified early. However, if left untreated the infection can remain for long periods of time and may cause more serious and life-threatening complications. Syphilis also increases the risk of acquiring HIV.

Individuals can get tested through their health care provider or at one of several clinics throughout the state. To locate a clinic, or for more information on syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases, call the Vermont Department of Health’s hotline at 802-863-7245 or 1-800-244-7639 (within Vermont), or visit our website at www.healthvermont.gov.

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