

Syphilis on the rise among gay, bisexual men: CDC

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Rates of chlamydia dip for the first time in 30 years

(HealthDay)—The number of cases of syphilis in the United States jumped 10 percent from 2012 to 2013, with gay and bisexual men accounting for 75 percent of the increase, U.S. health officials reported Tuesday.

Rates of another sexually transmitted disease—chlamydia—fell for the first time in 30 years, with more than 1.4 million reported cases in 2013. This represented a 1.5 percent decrease from 2012, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"There are over 20 million cases of sexually transmitted diseases [STDs] every year in the United States, and they continue to pose a risk of lifelong complications for millions of Americans," said Dr. Jonathan Mermin, director of CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention.

According to the report, 17,357 cases of syphilis were reported in 2013—a rate of 5.5 per 100,000 people.

There are a variety of reasons that put gay and bisexual men at high risk for syphilis, said Mermin.

"Some are the high number of sexual partners and sexual networks that create a vicious cycle where the prevalence of syphilis is higher. And that leads to higher incidence, which leads to higher prevalence, and that cycle can increase the frequency of infection," he said.

Dr. Jill Rabin, co-chief of the division of ambulatory care in the Women's Health Programs-PCAP Services at North Shore-LIJ Health System in New Hyde Park, N.Y., called the increase in syphilis cases "very alarming."

"Syphilis is like the canary in the coal mine for HIV," the virus that causes AIDS, she said. "People are going to be positive for syphilis before they are diagnosed with HIV. This means that there is a potential increase in HIV cases."

The sores caused by syphilis make it easier to get or give someone HIV. If pregnant, syphilis can cause birth defects, or you could lose your baby. In rare cases, syphilis causes serious health problems and even death, according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

Syphilis is easy to cure with antibiotics if caught early.

For chlamydia, the infection rate was about 447 per 100,000 people in 2013. Cases remain of chlamydia remain concentrated among young women, according to the report.

If left untreated, chlamydia can result in severe reproductive health complications, including ectopic pregnancy, a life-threatening condition in which the fertilized egg attaches outside the uterus, and infertility.

Infections of a third sexually transmitted disease—gonorrhea—remained roughly unchanged from 2012 to 2013, at a rate of 106 per 100,000 people. There were 333,004 reported cases in

2013. Mermin said the rate of drug-resistant gonorrhea has slowed and there is still an effective antibiotic to treat it.

Fred Wyand, a spokesman for the American Sexual Health Association, said the stigma of a sexually transmitted disease shouldn't keep people from being diagnosed and treated.

"Having an STD doesn't mean someone is dirty or broken," he said. "Far from it.

"One of the great barriers to having sexual health conversations is the sense of embarrassment. People need to have frank, open conversations," he added. "It's not about sex, it's about health."

More information: For more on STDs, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov).

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