

Sexually transmitted diseases hit Putnam, NY

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Public health leaders warned that sexually transmitted diseases have spread at alarming rates in recent years across the Hudson Valley and the country.

Putnam County, for instance, saw a spike in gonorrhea cases between 2016 and 2017, rising from 17 to 27, a nearly 60 percent increase.

At the same time, both chlamydia and syphilis numbers remained relatively stable in the county, after a dramatic rise of 125 percent in syphilis in 2016, according to Putnam's interim health commissioner, Dr. Michael Nesheiwat.

"The resurgence of sexually transmitted diseases is quite serious," he said. "If untreated, these diseases can cause severe health problems."

The latest statistics followed record increases in infections from three sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, in recent years.

In fact, more than 2 million new cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis were reported in the United States in 2016 — the most ever, according to the USA Today Network.

Rates for all three have been rising for several years. Health officials have said better testing and diagnosis have helped increased detection of cases, but also that treatment and prevention programs have been hurt by budget cuts.

Chlamydia is the most common, with nearly 1.6 million cases reported in 2016. About 470,000 gonorrhea cases were reported, and 28,000 cases of the most contagious forms of syphilis. The diseases are treatable with antibiotics.

Nesheiwat noted that Putnam's Health Department recently joined the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other partners to promote the "Treat Me Right" campaign. It is focused on outreach tied to improving the patient-provider relationship to curb STDs.

"The doctor/patient rapport is a key ingredient to all successful medical care," Nesheiwat said. "The Health Department is spearheading efforts and partnering with local physicians to increase appropriate testing... In this way we can stem this trend."

Unique challenges

STDs pose a unique challenge for medical workers because some patients will have no symptoms, or the symptoms may be similar to other problems, Nesheiwat said. For example, a woman with gonorrhea may experience mild symptoms such as pain or burning when urinating, which might be easily mistaken for a bladder infection.

The only sure way to know if someone has an STD is to be tested, Nesheiwat said. Primary-care providers can order tests and prescribe the right treatments. For information about prevention, symptoms or transmission, visit the Putnam County website, or call 845-808-1390.

The CDC tracks STD statistics across the country. The most recently comparable figures span between 2002 and 2015. What follows are statistics for Westchester, Rockland and Dutchess counties, and New York state overall, for various diseases.

Gonorrhea:

Rockland had 71 cases in 2015, down from 77 in 2014. Its peak in available data came in 2002, at 126 cases, or about 43 per 100,000 people.

Westchester had 499 cases in 2015, up from 469 in 2014. Its peak was in 2012, at 623 cases, or 65 per 100,000 people.

Dutchess had 126 cases in 2015, down from 128 in 2014. Its peak was in 2003, at 207 cases, or 72 per 100,000 people.

The state had 25,561 cases in 2015, up from the prior year. That's part of the 395,216 cases across the country in 2015.

Chlamydia:

Rockland had 762 cases in 2015, up from 741 in 2014. Its peak was in 2012, at 828 cases, or 260 per 100,000 people.

Westchester had 3,381 cases in 2015, a peak of 347 cases per 100,000 people. It was up slightly from 3,280 cases in 2014.

Dutchess had 907 cases in 2015, a peak of 305 cases per 100,000 people. It was up slightly from 831 cases in 2014.

The state had 103,615 cases in 2015, up from the prior year. That's part of 1.5 million cases across the country in 2015.

Primary and secondary syphilis:

The state had 2,006 cases in 2015, up from the prior year. That's part of 23,872 cases across the country in 2015.