



Press Release

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Public Health Leaders Gather at National STD Prevention Conference to Address Heavy Toll of Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Focus on Disproportionate Burden among Women, African-Americans, Gay and Bisexual Men

More than 750 public health leaders will convene in Atlanta today for the 2010 National STD Prevention Conference, the only conference focused exclusively on reducing the burden of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the United States. The three-day conference will feature more than 300 new studies, including a CDC analysis finding continued high rates of herpes (HSV-2) in the United States, particularly among women and African-Americans. CDC will also release the results of a new analysis of HIV and syphilis rates among gay and bisexual men.

"As the studies presented at this conference show, the disparities in STD rates among women, African-Americans, and gay and bisexual men remain stark," said Kevin Fenton, M.D., director of CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention. "Given everything we know about how to prevent, diagnose and treat STDs, it is unacceptable that STDs remain such a widespread public health problem in the United States today."

Several studies presented at the conference provide additional evidence of what works to reduce the spread of STDs, including retesting for chlamydia after initial treatment to monitor for repeat infections, and expedited partner therapy – a clinical practice that allows health care providers to provide treatment to sexual partners of those diagnosed with chlamydia or gonorrhea without giving them a full medical exam.

Other studies provide new insights into socioeconomic and other factors that contribute to STD disparities, including lack of access to health care, racial discrimination, and misinformation about STDs.

"We have a better understanding than ever of the reasons for STD disparities," said John M. Douglas, Jr., M.D., director of CDC's Division of STD Prevention. "It's critical that we address the root causes of this problem because it is affecting our most vulnerable populations. We must use insights gained through research and conferences like this to guide the development of STD prevention programs."

Conference keynote speakers, including Thomas Frieden, M.D., director of CDC, and William Foege, M.D., senior fellow of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carter Center, will discuss the future of STD prevention at a time when severely limited resources at all levels have taken a heavy toll on the nation's public health infrastructure.

"It is clear that public programs alone won't be able to dramatically reduce STD rates. Everyone must be involved in the solution," said Douglas. "We need to collaborate with the private sector to expand public awareness, increase the role of private health care providers in STD screening and treatment, and encourage open discussions about sexual health within our families and communities to reduce the stigma of STDs."

CDC estimates that there are 19 million new STD infections every year, making STDs the most commonly reported infectious diseases in the United States. STDs are estimated to cost the U.S. health care system about \$16 billion annually, and can cause serious long-term health consequences. Left untreated, STDs such as chlamydia and gonorrhea can lead to infertility, and many STDs increase the risk of HIV infection.

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The National STD Prevention Conference, held biennially, is the only major U.S. conference that focuses exclusively on advances and challenges in efforts to halt the spread of these serious diseases. It is sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with support from the American Sexually Transmitted Disease Association, American Social Health Association, and National Coalition of STD Directors. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/stdconference.

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