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Howard County Health Department Highlights Health Impacts of Sexually Transmitted Diseases during STD Awareness Month in April

Columbia, MD - Nearly 20 million new sexually transmitted infections (STIs) occur in the United States every year, costing the American healthcare system nearly \$16 billion in direct medical costs alone, states a report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In 2016, Howard County chlamydia and gonorrhea rates were the highest they have been in 10 years. Chlamydia rates increased more than 300% from 62 (1996) to 271 (2016). Gonorrhea rates increased 13% during the same period.

America's youth shoulder a substantial burden of these infections. CDC estimates that half of all new STIs in the U.S. occur among young men and women aged 15 to 24. In Howard County during 2016, youth ages 15-19 represented only 6% of the population, but were disproportionately affected by STIs. In fact, 29% of youth ages 15-19 tested positive for chlamydia and 14% for gonorrhea.

Dr. Maura Rossman, Howard County Health Officer, says, "STI screening and early diagnosis are essential in preventing transmission and the long-term health consequences of STIs". Abstaining from sex, reducing the number of sexual partners, and consistently and correctly using condoms are all effective prevention strategies. Safe, effective vaccines are also available to prevent hepatitis B and some types of the human papillomavirus (HPV) that cause cancer.

For all individuals who are sexually active – particularly young people – STI screening and prompt treatment are critical to protect one's health and prevent transmission to others. The Howard County Health Department provides free screening and treatment for those under 21 years of age.

More information about STDs is available at www.hchealth.org or by calling 410-313-7500.

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