

STDs Still Common in Adolescents, Minorities

BY LORINDA BULLOCK

The rate of infection from sexually transmitted diseases is not slowing down any time soon—particularly among adolescent girls and African Americans, according to a report from the Centers for Disease and Control.

In 2008, about 1.2 million cases of chlamydia and nearly 337,000 cases of gonorrhea were reported. The highest numbers of chlamydia and gonorrhea (409,531 cases) were reported in girls aged 15-19 years. Young women aged 20-24 years followed closely behind.

Untreated STDs are estimated to cause at least 24,000 women to become infertile each year in the United States, the CDC said.

"When you take into account the severe health consequences of STDs and



'We cannot ignore the glaring racial disparities in rates of STDs.'

DR. DOUGLAS

the millions of Americans infected every year, it is clear that much more work needs to be done to prevent unintended long-term health issues," said Dr. Kevin Fenton, director of the CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention.

Racial minorities continue to be heavily affected by STDs, and African Americans continue to lead in number of the cases reported. According to the report, "gonorrhea rates among African Americans were higher than any other racial or ethnic group and 20 times higher than that of whites." Although African Americans represent 12% of the U.S. population, "they accounted for about 71% of reported gonorrhea cases and almost half of all chlamydia and syphilis cases (48% and 49%, respectively) in 2008," the CDC reported.

"We cannot ignore the glaring racial disparities in rates of STDs, particularly when we consider the hard truth that gonorrhea rates among African Americans are 20 times those of whites," said Dr. John M. Douglas Jr., director of the CDC's Division of STD Prevention.

The report cited these statistics:

► **Gonorrhea.** In 2008, the gonorrhea rate among blacks was more than 20 times higher than that of whites (625 cases/100,000 vs. 31/100,000).

► **Chlamydia.** The chlamydia rate among blacks in 2008 was more than eight times higher than that of whites (1,519 cases/100,000 vs. 174).

► **Syphilis.** The 2008 syphilis rate among blacks was about eight times higher than that of whites (17 cases/100,000 vs. 2).

Hispanic and American Indian/Alaskan Natives also saw "significant" increases in STD cases, the report said. Rates of gonorrhea infections among

Hispanics and American Indian/Alaskan Natives were more than two and three times higher, respectively, than in whites. Chlamydia rates in those populations were about three and five times higher. Syphilis infection rates among Hispanics were double those of whites; the rate among American Indian/Alaskan Natives was comparable with that of whites.

"Research has shown that socioeconomic barriers to quality health care and

higher overall prevalence of STDs within minority communities contribute to this pervasive threat," Dr. Douglas said.

"Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis cases represent only a fraction of the true STD burden in the United States," the CDC said. Almost 19 million new sexually transmitted infections occur each year, almost half of which are among 15- to 24-year-olds. Annually, the CDC estimates that STDs cost the U.S. health

care system as much as \$15.9 billion.

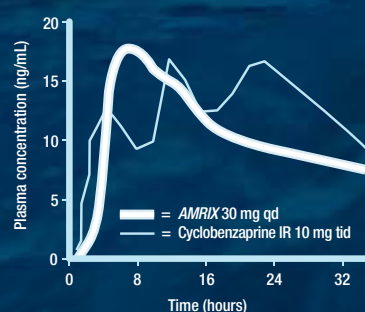
The agency recommends annual chlamydia screening for sexually active women younger than 26 years and supports U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommendations to screen high-risk, sexually active women for gonorrhea. The CDC also recommends that all sexually active men who have sex with men be tested at least annually for syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV. ■

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Reference: 1. Data on file. Study 1107. Cephalon, Inc.; 2004.

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