INCREASE OF SYPHILIS IN MONONGALIA COUNTY
MORGANTOWN, WV – JULY 30, 2015

Currently public health is seeing an increase of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) also known as sexually transmitted infections (STI). Syphilis, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) [Venereal warts], and Genital Herpes are problematic STDs that cause 20 million new cases each year in the Americans. The most recent STD to show an unexpected increase in Monongalia County has been Syphilis. When asked what might be responsible for the current increase Dr. Lee Smith, County Health Officer and Executive Director of the Monongalia County Health Department, said: "This upsurge is not yet clearly understood but most likely is multi-factorial. Perhaps the biggest culprit is participating in risky sexual behavior including unprotected sex, men having sex with other men (MSM), multiple anonymous partners and using social media apps to quickly identify others who wish to have sex with unknown partners. Our community also has many transients who may be infected but not diagnosed. In addition, we are probably victims of our own success as ten years ago public health had diminished the number of syphilis cases to a minimal amount. As a result, we have not been as aggressive in raising awareness in at risk populations. This combined with the beliefs held by many that there is a cure for everything and even if I catch something has resulted in a casual attitude toward using proper protection during sexual activity".

You can get syphilis by direct contact with a syphilis sore during anal, vaginal, or oral sex. Syphilis can also be spread from an infected mother to her unborn baby. The only way to avoid STDs is to not have vaginal, anal, or oral sex. If you are sexually active, there are two things that you can do to lower your chances of getting syphilis. Use latex condoms the right way every time you have sex and have a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and has negative STD test results.

Any sexually active person can get syphilis through unprotected sex. Syphilis is an STD that can cause long-term complications if not treated correctly. It can be cured with the right antibiotics from your health care provider. However, having Syphilis once does not protect you from getting it again. Have an honest and open talk with your health care provider and ask whether you should be tested for syphilis or other STDs. You should get tested regularly for syphilis if you are pregnant, are a man who has sex with men, have an HIV infection, and/or have partner(s) who have tested positive for syphilis.
The Monongalia County Health Department offers free of charge confidential evaluation, examination, and treatment for syphilis when necessary. Condoms are available upon request and anyone wishing more information may visit our web page (www.monchd.org) or make a confidential appointment by call 304-598-5119.

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