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Lab Confirmed Syphilis on the Rise in Butte County

BUTTE COUNTY, Calif. – The Butte County Public Health Department (BCPHD) is reporting major increases in lab confirmed cases of the sexually transmitted disease (STD) Syphilis. From January through June 2015, a total of 12 confirmed syphilis cases were reported, compared with only two cases in 2014 during the same time period. Cases have been reported in people 20-29 years of age and 40-54 years old, with one third of those cases occurring in women. The remaining cases were found in men who have sex with men (MSM) and heterosexual males.

Syphilis is a bacterial infection spread through sexual contact, including oral, vaginal and anal sex, with an infected person. The disease is known as “The Great Imitator” because syphilis symptoms can look like symptoms from other diseases. Syphilis develops in stages and symptoms vary with each stage. The most common symptoms include: small ulcers on the genitals, rectum or mouth, and a non-itchy body rash on the palms of hands or soles of feet, often mistaken as a skin reaction or condition. Stages may overlap and don’t always occur in the same order. You may be infected with syphilis and not notice any symptoms for years. If left untreated, syphilis can cause permanent health problems, including blindness and damage to the heart, brain and spinal cord. Pregnant women infected with syphilis may pass the bacteria to their baby during childbirth which may cause severe birth defects and health issues that may not show up for years after birth.

“Testing and treatment for syphilis is quick and simple. We urge people at risk to get tested often, as symptoms may be hard to recognize” states Butte County Health Officer, Dr. Mark Lundberg.

Increases in syphilis throughout Butte County are consistent with statewide trends. The California Department of Public Health is reporting an increase in ocular (infection of the eye) syphilis.

BCPHD says that if you are sexually active, your chances of getting syphilis *may be reduced* by being in a monogamous relationship, limiting sex partners and using a latex condom every time you have sex. Free condoms and free or low-cost STD testing is available at BCPHD clinics in both Chico and Oroville. For more information or to make an appointment please call 891-2731 in Chico or 538-7341 in Oroville. Additional locations throughout Butte County offer free condoms. To find a location near you, visit: www.condomfinder.org. Information is also available online at: www.buttecounty.net/publichealth or by calling the STD Information Line at 1-877-STD-INFO.

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