



DATE: March 11, 2016
TO: State Board of Health Members
FROM: Joseph Iser, MD, DrPH, MSc, Chief Health Officer
SUBJECT: Chief Health Officer Report

Syphilis Outbreak

The Health District has identified a 128 percent increase in reported syphilis cases in Clark County since 2012 and is officially considering the increase to be an outbreak for early syphilis cases. Early syphilis is an infection that has been acquired within the previous 12 months. Men account for 615 of the 694 cases that were diagnosed in 2015. The Health District is urging health care providers, especially those who treat young men, to immediately report a diagnosis to the Health District and begin prompt treatment for patients and their partners.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were 5,979 cases of primary and secondary syphilis in the United States and men accounted for 59 percent of cases reported in 2000. In 2014, there were 19,999 cases with men accounting for 91 percent and men who have sex with men were 83 percent of men impacted. Syphilis can also increase the risks of HIV transmission. Racial and ethnic disparities continue across the country with regard to syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections. In 2014, primary and secondary syphilis rates among African-Americans were 5.4 times higher than the rate for whites. Congenital syphilis rates also increase when rates of disease increase among women.

In Nevada, rates of primary and secondary syphilis were the highest in the West with a rate of 12.8 cases per 100,000; in comparison, Wyoming had a rate of 0.7 cases per 100,000.

Zika Virus

The current Zika virus outbreak continues to cause concern as more travel-acquired cases of Zika virus disease are reported in the United States and amid reports of sharp increases in pregnant women giving birth to babies with birth defects and poor pregnancy outcomes, a link not associated with previous outbreaks. The CDC is recommending special precautions for pregnant women, women who are trying to become pregnant, and their partners.

The virus is generally spread to people through mosquito bites. To date, the species known to transmit the virus, *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus*, have not been detected in Clark County. The Southern Nevada Health District's vector surveillance program has updated its methods in recent years to include traps specifically designed for capturing the *Aedes* species, as these mosquitoes are also capable of vectoring chikungunya and Dengue Fever, diseases that are emerging in the United States.

There is also evidence that the virus can be spread by sexual transmission from a man to his partners. In known cases of likely sexual transmission, the men had Zika symptoms. But the virus can be spread before, during, and after men have symptoms.

Zika virus disease usually presents as a mild illness with symptoms that last several days to a week. The most common symptoms of the disease are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis. The illness rarely requires hospitalization or results in death. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued travel notices for regions and countries where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Local vector-borne transmission of Zika has not been reported in the United States, but cases of Zika have been reported in returning travelers. The Health District has sent samples of potential travel-associated cases to the CDC for testing, with no positive results received to date.

Tobacco Control Activities

The Southern Nevada Health District's Brief Tobacco Use Intervention is an evidence based process used by health care providers to identify current smokers and refer them to cessation resources. The Health District's Tobacco Control Program staff members have recently expanded the availability of this training to a broad range of health-related service providers. In December 2015, Health District staff trained 20 client specialists with the Las Vegas Urban League prisoner reentry program on the delivery of brief tobacco use interventions and emerging tobacco products. Additionally, staff distributed 2,000 educational materials promoting the Tobacco Quitline.

Also in the month of the December, staff provided training to 40 Clark County Healthy Start personnel as part of a national Truth Initiative project. Truth staff provided a major component of the training and Health District Tobacco Control Program staff provided a presentation on local resources, brief tobacco use interventions, the Tobacco Quitline, and emerging tobacco products.

Tobacco Control Program staff is also working with the Nevada Division of Welfare and northern Nevada partners to coordinate a program that will include training Welfare Division staff on delivering Brief Tobacco Use Interventions. In addition, media spots will be developed to air in Welfare Division offices.

Injury Prevention Program

Health District staff is assisting with SafeTALK trainings in Clark County. SafeTALK is a suicide alertness training that is available to everyone. Trainings are conducted throughout the state three to five times per month and Health District staff assists with training in Clark County. SafeTALK educates participants to recognize the warning signs indicating the risk of suicide and how to connect people with resources and aid. The Clark County School District is sending several staff members to the training in order to conduct its own trainings of its staff in the future. Additionally, there are plans to train more than 500 supervisors with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department in the SafeTALK program by April 2016.

UNLV Coaches Challenge

The Health District wrapped up its annual UNLV Coaches Challenge in December. The program encourages elementary school students in grades 1-5 to engage in daily physical activity and to eat fruits and vegetables. The 2015 program had 11,490 students signed up from 352 different elementary school classrooms representing 78 different elementary schools. Participating students tracked their fruit and vegetable consumption and their physical activity to earn points for their classrooms. The winning classrooms were selected in December, and each received tickets to either a UNLV men's or women's basketball game. In addition, UNLV Head Coaches will visit all the winning classrooms in the spring of 2016.