



STD Rates Alarming High – California Must Invest in Prevention

STD Rates in California Reach Epidemic Levels

Sexually transmitted disease (STD) rates have hit a record high in California for the third year in a row. Nearly half a million Californians were infected with syphilis, chlamydia or gonorrhea in 2016 – up 40% since 2013. In 2016 alone, gonorrhea rates increased by double digits in the following counties: Los Angeles 27%, San Diego 35.5%, Orange 32%, San Francisco 18%, and Fresno 13%. Mendocino and Kings Counties led the increase at 81% and 41%, respectively.

Young people under the age of 30, men who have sex with men (MSM) populations and communities of color are disproportionately impacted. Statewide data indicate over half of all STDs in the state are experienced among California youth ages 15 – 24 years old.

California has the third highest syphilis rates in the nation. While 90% of all male syphilis cases in 2013 were among MSM populations, the epidemic has spread among women. Between 2015 and 2016, the syphilis rate among women of reproductive age increased by 50%. California ranks 2nd only to Louisiana in primary and secondary syphilis rates.

Although the global Zika epidemic was declared over at the end of 2016, Zika continues to be a threat among Californians that travel to high-risk regions in the world. As of 2018, more than 600 Californians contracted Zika while traveling abroad and 9 have contracted the virus through sexual contact with people who acquired the infection abroad, and the first Zika case of the year was detected in January in Los Angeles County.

Approximately \$1 billion is spent annually statewide on health costs associated with STDs.

Why is STD Prevention Important Now?

STD prevention is an essential primary care strategy for improving sexual and reproductive health. Despite the costs and health complications related to STDs, and the fact that they are largely preventable, STDs remain a significant public health problem nationwide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that there are approximately 19 million new STD infections each year—almost half of them among young people ages 15 to 24. The cost of STDs to the U.S. health care system is estimated to be as much as \$15.9 billion annually.

Untreated STDs can lead to serious long-term health consequences. The CDC estimates that undiagnosed and untreated STDs cause at least 24,000 women in the United States each year to become infertile. The Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) can lead to increased risk of developing cancer in the cervix, throat, tongue, mouth, and anus. The number of HPV-related cancers in men dramatically increased in 2016. Untreated syphilis can also lead to negative maternal child health outcomes, including infant death. The CDC estimates that of the pregnant women who acquire syphilis up to four years before delivery, 80% will transmit the infection to the fetus and

40% may result in stillbirth or death. STDs also increase both the transmission and acquisition of HIV, particularly among MSM populations.

Current Funding at Risk + Levels Don't Meet the Need

In the current political climate at the federal level, federal investments for STD prevention are also at risk. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grants more than \$10 million annually to California entities that provide STD screenings and treatments, operate prevention programs and address disease outbreaks. California grantees include the California Department of Public Health (DPH), several County departments of public health and the University of California, San Francisco. In 2017, the Republican-led House of Representatives voted in support of a federal budget that drastically cut the CDC's budget for STD prevention and treatment and the Trump administration budget called for a significant reduction in funding levels. If federal funding is slashed, STD prevention capacity in California will be impacted, and current funding levels are unable to fully address the public health epidemic at hand without additional investment from the state.

Funding Request

To address alarmingly high STD rates across California, Essential Access Health proposes an additional \$10 million be continually allocated to the STD Control Branch for STD prevention activities and outreach and education efforts.

Funding will be prioritized to support activities targeting communities disproportionately impacted by STDs. Activities may include:

- Collection of more robust, geo-coded data and epidemiological research to inform and evaluate STD prevention interventions and programs
- Conducting and coordinating targeted, culturally appropriate and responsive outreach and health promotion efforts
- Providing STD screening, testing and treatment for the remaining uninsured and populations at high risk for STD transmission who might otherwise not receive care
- Implement innovative community-based projects to effectively reduce local STD rates

About Essential Access Health

Essential Access Health (formerly California Family Health Council) champions and promotes quality sexual and reproductive health care for all. We achieve our mission through an umbrella of programs and services, including advanced clinical research, provider training, clinic support initiatives, and advocacy and consumer awareness. As the administrator of California's Title X federal family planning program – the nation's largest Title X system, Essential Access Health supports the delivery of quality sexual and reproductive health care at over 340 health centers across 37 counties that collectively serve over 1,000,000 women, men and teens each year. Learn more at [**essentialaccess.org**](https://essentialaccess.org).