The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

Media Coverage Report
Prepared by Brown•Miller Communications
October 2007
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

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STD cases prove costly in youths
Study says 1.1 million new cases are reported each year, adding up to more than $1 billion in lifetime medical costs

October 10, 2007
By Sara Steffens

Each year, teens and young adults in California suffer more than 1.1 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases, according to a new study from California’s Public Health Institute.

And those infections bring more than $1 billion in lifetime medical costs, the report shows.

“Society is not aware of how common STDs are, and how much not just personal stress and burden they cause, but financial burden,” said Petra Jerman, a research scientist for the Oakland-based institute and co-author of the study.

Published in the California Journal of Health Promotion, the study focused on eight major STDs: chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, HPV, hepatitis B, trichomoniasis and HIV.

Researchers used mathematical models to calculate the incidence of the infections among 15- to 24-year-olds in each California county.

In 2005, new STD cases totaled:
• 62,417 in Alameda County
• 28,519 in Contra Costa County
• 15,440 in Solano County
• 8,642 in San Mateo County.

Existing public health reports show only a fraction of those cases, partly because many STDs are not subject to mandatory reporting -- including human papillomavirus, or HPV, which accounts for more than half of the estimated cases in the new report.

HPV is common partly because it’s easy to transmit, Jerman said. It’s also the target of a vaccine recently licensed for young adults by the federal Food and Drug Administration.

“As more young people get vaccinated, then the numbers should go down,” Jerman said. “We might be able to avoid those costs of HPV and their consequence of cervical cancer.”

New HPV infections accounted for $460 million of the total medical costs. Though much less common, new HIV infections are more costly, at $560 million.

Public health workers have long known that STD cases are under-reported, said Francie Wise, communicable disease program chief for Contra Costa Public Health.

“Some physicians aren’t clear as to what’s reportable. Some see these things as very private and they don’t want to breach the patient’s privacy,” she said. “And patients say ‘Please don’t report it.’”

Teenagers and young adults are biologically more susceptible to contracting STDs, Wise said, but they may not realize the
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

long-term effects the infections can have.

“Gonorrhea or chlamydia, especially if they go untreated, can lead to infertility, which is a lifetime issue for women,” she said.

The new numbers underscore the importance of using protection if sexually active and promptly seeking medical care for any symptoms, Wise said.

And because women can contract “silent infections” that go on for years without obvious effects, she said, “it doesn’t hurt to have screening tests periodically (even) if you don’t have symptoms.”

The prevalence of STDs among teens and young adults shows the need for accurate, comprehensive sex education in schools, said Chris Lee, vice president of public policy and advocacy for Planned Parenthood Shasta-Diablo.

“Kids are obviously still having sex,” he said. “Abstinence-only is not the answer.”

Researchers say they hope that seeing the long-term costs of STDs will help spur renewed public discussion about the need to invest in preventive measures, Jerman said.

She said she hopes the county-specific data will catch the attention of high school and college-age youths.

“I hope they’re surprised,” she said. “I hope it makes them think, ‘Oh my gosh, they’re around us, we need to protect ourselves.’”

Also published:

State releases STD study

STD study focuses on state’s youth

Study finds 1.1 million new youth STD cases per year

Study finds 1.1 million new youth STD cases per year
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More state teens suffer from new cases of STDS

Study shows youths suffer over 1.1 M news STD cases yearly

Society is not aware of how common STDS are
New cases of sexually transmitted diseases among young people in California are occurring at 10 times the reported rate, according to a new analysis by the Public Health Institute, an Oakland health care think tank.

“This epidemic is like an iceberg. What you see is a small part of what you have,” said Petra Jerman, lead author of the study published recently in the California Journal of Health Promotion.

Jerman stressed that there has not been a surge in sexually transmitted diseases, it’s just that the sheer size of the problem has never been fully appreciated. Common but potentially dangerous infections such as human papillomavirus (HPV) are not required to be reported, and other more recognized venereal disease such as gonorrhea and syphilis are supposed to be reported but often are not.

Driving up the numbers in particular are fresh estimates for some of the lesser known, but most widespread sexually transmitted diseases: chlamydia, trichomoniasis and HPV, which together account for the overwhelming majority of new infections.

Using a new method to calculate the number of new venereal disease cases, the group concluded that there were a total of 1.1 million new infections among California youth in 2005 - the latest year for which data are available. These infections will ultimately cost $1 billion to treat.

Jerman and colleagues at the Public Health Institute used a method developed in 2004 by scientists at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who recognized that there was little reliable information on the extent of these infections, particularly among those aged 15-24.

This was the first time the method for calculating sexually transmitted diseases has been applied at the state and county level.

They found, for instance, that there were about 30,000 new cases of sexually transmitted diseases in 2005 among 15- to 24-year-olds in each of three Bay Area counties: San Francisco, Santa Clara and Contra Costa counties; and more than 62,000 in Alameda County.

Lifetime costs for treating these diseases varied widely, however. The model shows a bill of $29 million to treat the new cases in Santa Clara County, and $83 million to treat the new infections in San Francisco. The reason for these different price tags is that HIV infection is, by far, the most expensive disease to acquire, and San Francisco has a higher number of new HIV infections among young people than other counties.

Statewide, the estimated 2,900 HIV infections that occurred in this group are expected to rack up lifetime treatment costs of $560 million - more than half the total for all the sexually transmitted infections.

Similarly, human papillomavirus infections - which cause genital warts and can lead to cervical cancer - are projected to cost $460 million to treat. This disease is expensive because it is so widespread - the model estimates that 590,000 young women and men were infected in 2005. In men, the disease goes largely unrecognized and untreated, whereas it costs an average of $1,500 to treat each woman for the infection or subsequent cancers.
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The analysis is based on estimates of new cases of eight different sexually transmitted diseases: gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B, genital herpes, HPV and trichomoniasis.

Of these, trichomoniasis is probably the least recognized by the general public, but it was responsible for 250,000 new infections among California youth, according to the study. Caused by a single-celled parasite, Trichomonas vaginalis, the disease causes inflammation of the vagina or urethra and can produce a frothy yellow-green discharge. It is readily treatable with a single dose of antibiotics, but left untreated in pregnant women it can lead to premature birth or babies born at less than five pounds.

Many sexually transmitted disease experts are frustrated that there is no requirement to report common infections such as trichomoniasis, HPV and herpes - and hence these diseases are poorly tracked and often little understood by the public. Although chlamydia has been reportable since 1989, and readily treatable, the disease still goes undetected in many women until they suffer fertility problems, ectopic pregnancies or pelvic inflammatory disease. The study estimates there were 180,000 new infections among California youth in 2005.

“The treatments for these diseases are simple, the tests are available, but no one knows about them,” said Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, director of STD prevention and control for the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

Klausner called the latest study a legitimate look at the real burden of sexually transmitted diseases in the state. “There’s been no updating of California’s STD program since it started 75 years ago,” he said. “These infections such as herpes and trichomoniasis have not been on the radar screen. It is about time we started counting these cases.”

According to California Department of Public Health spokeswoman Lea Brooks, $10.6 million in state and federal funds are spent annually on sexually transmitted disease control. “What this new report shows is that, if we don’t cover the cost of prevention and early treatment, we’ll pay much more later on,” she said.

Online resources

For more information on STDs, go to:
links.sfgate.com/ZBCN

To see the article in the California Journal of Health Promotion upon which this story is based, go to:
links.sfgate.com/ZBCO

STD questions and answers

Q. Has there been an increase in sexually transmitted diseases?
A. No. The new study suggests there have always been more cases than we officially count.

Q. Why is the official count so low?
A. Often doctors treat chlamydia and gonorrhea cases without confirmation tests, so the cases aren’t recorded. Sometimes infected individuals are asymptomatic. Also, doctors are not required to report some of the most common infections such as human papillomavirus (HPV), genital herpes and trichomoniasis.

Q. Tricho-what?
A. Trichomoniasis is a parasitic infection that primarily causes inflammation of the vagina, and can cause premature birth and low-birth-weight babies if left untreated in pregnant women. There were 250,000 new infections among youth, ages 15 to 25, in California in 2005.

Q. If some conditions are asymptomatic, how does someone find out they are infected?
A. Screening tests are readily available. Infections such as chlamydia, trichomoniasis and HPV can cause serious health problems for women without outward symptoms of infection.

Q. Are these treatable?
A. All sexually transmitted diseases are preventable, and most are readily curable with antibiotics. Viral infections such as herpes and HIV are lifelong but can be treated.
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Los Angeles Times

State and county STD rate soars
Report says there were 1 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases among people. Orange County had 53,566.

October 10, 2007
By Thomas H. Maugh II

An estimated 1 million young Californians had a sexually transmitted disease in 2005, including 1 in every 4 or 5 young people in Los Angeles County, researchers said Tuesday.

“We were expecting high numbers . . . even to us,” said epidemiologist Petra Jerman of the Public Health Institute in Oakland, who led the new study reported in the California Journal of Health Promotion. “It is clear we are living in the dark about how common STDs are and how many kids acquire them in a given year.”

The report also highlights the large number of new cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea -- which are associated with HIV and are considered to be among the most serious STDs -- among people age 15 to 24, said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

“It’s really disturbing that we have not been able to make more progress with that,” he said. “We don’t have young people using protection when they are having sex.”

The new study, the first of its kind, also found that the direct cost of treating the new infections is more than $1 billion per year.

“We’ve seen the human toll, but this provides the first estimate of the enormous economic cost that is borne in California due to STDs,” said Dr. Peter R. Kerndt, director of the county’s sexually transmitted disease program.

The incidence of the infections was not known previously because many of them -- including genital herpes, human papilloma virus and trichomoniasis -- do not have to be reported to public health authorities.

Many that should be reported are not because of incomplete screening of at-risk populations, underreporting of infections by medical and laboratory providers, and infections that are treated without a confirmatory test.

Jerman and her colleagues used a computer model developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to estimate the incidence of STDs. Using the technique, CDC researchers reported in 2004 that 9.1 million new STDs occurred nationwide among 15- to 24-year-olds in the year 2000 with a direct medical cost of $6.5 billion.

Using the technique, Jerman and her colleagues estimated that there were 1.1 million new cases of STDs in California in that age group in 2005, with a cost of $1.1 billion.

HPV (590,000) and trichomoniasis (250,000) infections accounted for most of the infections, with chlamydia (180,000) a distant third.

The good news, Fielding said, is that HPV infections “are clearly vaccine-preventable, at least in part. . . . If every young woman had the HPV vaccine, this number would go down very substantially.”

Not surprisingly, the largest county, Los Angeles, had the largest number of new infections, 361,876. San Diego County had 85,523, San Bernardino had 75,606 and Orange County had 53,566.
Almost 40 percent of Sacramento County’s teens and young adults carry a sexually transmitted disease, the third-highest rate in the state, according to a study from the Public Health Institute released Tuesday.

The study included STD estimates among 15- to 24-year-olds for several diseases that are not reported because labs or doctors are not required to notify the county or state when they are detected.

Those diseases include common infections like HPV -- human papillomavirus -- an often symptomless disease that can lead to cancer, and trichomoniasis, a highly infectious but treatable disease with mild to moderate symptoms for women and usually few for men.

Last month, a Bee article noted sharp increases in Sacramento’s reportable STDs -- diseases such as chlamydia and gonorrhea.

The chlamydia rate rose 52 percent from 2002 through 2006; the gonorrhea rate jumped 35 percent.

The new institute report “pretty much reinforces that sexually transmitted diseases are a major problem in the region,” said county Public Health Officer Dr. Glennah Trochet.

Trochet cautioned that the institute’s numbers were estimates and said that her office has not done any independent surveillance on the diseases not reported by doctors and labs.

“Given the methodology, it’s about as accurate as it can be,” Trochet said.

Sacramento’s STD infection rate among residents ages 15 to 24 was higher in 2005 than all other counties in the state except San Francisco County and tiny Alpine County, according to the institute’s report.

It cost Sacramento $52 million to detect and treat those infections, the report estimated.

Statewide, about 20 percent of teens and young adults were infected with STDs during 2005, the study found, at a public cost of more than $1 billion in medical expenses.

“STDs are more common than most people believe they are,” Dr. Petra Jerman, a research scientist for the Public Health Institute, said in an interview.

The Public Health Institute is an independent nonprofit based in Oakland.

It looked at infection rates for chlamydia, HIV, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, HPV, hepatitis B, and trichomoniasis. Since the state and counties don’t keep track of most of those diseases, the institute extrapolated estimates for most diseases using the number of gonorrhea and chlamydia cases during 2005.

The report did not speculate why particular counties had higher infection rates.

But Trochet said Sacramento County’s high rate is largely attributable to a lack of resources to combat the diseases. Also, she said, the larger the pool of STD carriers, the faster the disease spreads.
STD treatment costs state over $1B a year

October 10, 2007
By Troy Anderson and Kelly Puente

More than 1 million young people in California have sexually transmitted diseases that cost the state more than $1 billion a year in treatment, according to a study set to be released today.

And nearly a third of all the cases - 361,876 - are in Los Angeles County at an annual cost of $390 million, according to the study by the Public Health Institute.

The findings contrast sharply with previous data based on cases reported among youth ages 15 to 24 - with researchers saying their findings are nearly 10 times higher. Researchers used statistic estimation methods recently developed at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to estimate the number of new cases and associated medical costs for eight major STDs.

“This epidemic is like an iceberg - what you see is just a small part of what you have,” said Petra Jerman, a research scientist at the Oakland-based Public Health Institute’s Center for Research and Adolescent Health.

“The estimated number of new cases and their associated costs illustrate that the STD epidemic among California youth remains largely hidden,” Jerman said.

The report comes as health officials have expressed growing concerns about serious complications STDs can cause. The human papillomaviruse, or HPV, is linked to cervical and anal cancer. Other STDs can increase the chance of contracting HIV by two to six times.

“If you look at the overall numbers, the biggest impact are from two diseases,” said Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. “One is HIV and the other is HPV.”

Fielding said the data also highlights the “hidden epidemic” of chlamydia and gonorrhea.

“This disproportionately affects young people and has a lot of secondary effects,” Fielding said. “For some women, chlamydia leads to infertility.”

From 2000 to 2005 in Los Angeles County, the number of reported cases of gonorrhea jumped from 7,199 to 10,494; syphilis more than tripled from 336 to 1,213; and chlamydia increased from 30,546 to 38,862.

When compared to other cities, Long Beach has a relatively high number of youth under 25 diagnosed with gonorrhea or chlamydia, according to Nettie DeAugustine, the Long Beach Health Department’s bureau manager for preventative health.

But DeAugustine said the numbers of reported STDS might be high due to programs such as the Health Department’s mobile clinics, which set up near schools or parks and allow youth to test for STDs through less invasive methods, like urine samples.

“Finding disease is not a bad thing,” she said. “It means you’re finding it.”

The numbers of youth in Long Beach diagnosed with gonorrhea has stayed relatively stable since 2001, according to reports, while the number of youth with chlamydia has increased by about 10 percent over the last five years.

The city has the most accurate statistics for chlamydia and gonorrhea, the two most common STDs, DeAugustine said. In 2006, there were 591 cases of gonorrhea diagnosed, compared with 651 in 2005. For chlamydia in 2006, there were 2,450 cases found, and 2,363 in 2005.
STDs such as herpes and HPV are more difficult to diagnose and not reported as frequently, DeAugustine said. Syphilis in youth under 25 is rare, she added.

“HIV is really what we are most concerned about,” said Dr. Peter Kerndt, director of the county’s Sexually Transmitted Disease Program. “We know the rates of HIV in the younger age groups and among minorities are increasing. That’s where the epidemic is growing the fastest.”

Kerndt noted several reasons for the increases, including better screening by youth covered under managed care insurance plans.

Also, today’s youth generally are more sexually active, sometimes have multiple sexual partners and simultaneously place themselves at higher risk by using drugs and alcohol, Kerndt said.

Health officials are also concerned about recent increases in different types of reported STDs among youth, including HIV, syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhea.

Health officials are especially concerned about HPV, noting that more than 90 percent of people who have the disease have no symptoms.

Although research suggests that most immune systems will eliminate HPV infection within a year or two, about 10 percent of people remain infected for much longer, possibly for life.

Also published in:

**Daily Breeze**
Youths’ STD rates are high, especially here
Bill for STDs: $1.1B
Calif. counties bearing the cost for young people

October 10, 2007

More than 1 million cases of sexually transmitted diseases among young people are costing counties statewide more than $1.1 billion dollars annually to treat.

A new study released this week by the Public Health Institute’s Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development shows more than 1.1 million new STD cases were reported in California among young people 15 to 24 in 2005.

In San Bernardino County alone, more than 75,000 new cases in the age group were reported in 2005. The cost to treat these new cases is slightly more than $50 million.

Los Angeles County has the highest bill of all - $390,000,000 to treat the 361,876 new STD cases reported there in 2005.

Cost of new STD cases for tri-county area (in 2005)

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
Population (ages 15-24): 338,796
New cases reported: 75,606
Cost to county: $50 million

RIVERSIDE COUNTY
Population (ages 15-24): 292,719
New cases reported: 37,175
Cost to county: $49 million

LOS ANGELES COUNTY
Population (ages 15-24): 1,414,241
New cases reported: 361,876
Cost to county: $390 million

Also published:

STD bill in state: $1.1B
Youth STDs higher than reported
Study finds number of cases is more than 10 times greater

October 10, 2007
By Larry Parsons

Sexually transmitted diseases among young people go mostly unreported, a hidden epidemic that obscures up to 8,500 cases a year in Monterey County with a treatment cost of $7 million, a statewide report says.

The study by the Public Health Institute of Oakland estimates that STD cases among Californians 15 to 24 years old are more than 10 times higher than those that are reported.

“We only see the tip of the iceberg,” said Dr. Lisa Hernandez, deputy county health officer.

There are a number of reasons for the difference between the estimated number of STD cases and those reported for people in that age group, Hernandez said. Some STDs are not reported. Others go undiagnosed because they don’t have symptoms, while others are undetected because people — especially young people — don’t have regular medical checkups.

“People don’t talk about it,” Hernandez said. “It’s not a topic of conversation at the dinner table or with friends, with family members, with children or with doctors.

“Symptoms often are not reported or not diagnosed,” she said.

The study was based on 2005 figures and relied on a statistical method developed by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Dr. Petra Jerman of the institute’s Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development. The results probably would be the same for more recent figures, she said.

The study looked at eight STDs — chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, HPV, hepatitis B, trichomoniasis and HIV — of which only five are required to be reported to the state.

“A great chunk of STDs are not reportable,” Jerman said. “We were all quite surprised by the numbers.”

She said the extremely large number of STDs that remain under the radar underscores the need for more money and resources for “additional primary prevention.”

The study reflects a need to increase health-care access to young people in an age group in which many probably skip regular checkups because they feel healthy or don’t have health insurance, Hernandez said.

“They are busy providing basic stuff like food and shelter and not necessarily thinking about health-care maintenance,” she said. “And a lot of STDs are (without symptoms).”

The study points to the need for more education about STDs, Hernandez said. Abstinence-based sex education, she said, may not even cover sexually transmitted diseases.

“We all have to work together. Part is reporting, part is getting people into care, and part is increasing access,” Hernandez said.

The study underscores the need for young people to use safe sex practices. Hernandez said young people should have frank conversations with their doctors about STDs.

The institute said the study would be used by state and local policymakers to review their STD prevention programs and resources.
The study was financed by a grant from the California Wellness Foundation.

Larry Parsons can be reached at 646-4379 or lparsons@montereyherald.com.

The study on STDs by the Public Health Institute can be viewed at teenbirths.phi.org/.

Go to our Web site to view the entire study on sexually transmitted diseases.

The high cost of STDs among youths in Monterey County

66,691 Population of 15- to 24-year-olds in Monterey County

8,494 Estimated new cases of STDs for that age group in Monterey County

$7 Million Total direct medical costs of STDs for that age group in Monterey County

Source: Public Health Institute
Treating 15-to 24-year-olds for venereal disease in San Diego County cost about $110 million in 2005 – higher than every county in the state except Los Angeles, according to a report released yesterday.

An estimated 85,000 teens and young adults diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases were lower per capita in San Diego County than the state average – 17 percent, compared with 20 percent. However, diseases diagnosed in the county’s youths and young adults are more expensive to treat.

“San Diego (County) has a greater number of chlamydia, gonorrhea and AIDS cases in the state, and that drives the cost,” said Petra Jerman of the Public Health Institute in Oakland, a nonprofit group that issued the report.

Drugs and hospitalization to treat those diseases are more expensive than for syphilis, human papillomavirus, genital herpes, hepatitis B and trichomoniasis, said Jerman, the lead author.

Statewide, an estimated 1.1 million STD cases were reported among young people in 2005. Direct medical costs totaled $1.1 billion.

The project, funded by the California Wellness Foundation, used a complex formula based on state and federal statistics to calculate the cost and burden of venereal disease on each county.

One oddity the researchers discovered: Orange County, similar to San Diego County in population and many other demographics, reported 53,566 STD cases among young people, almost 32,000 fewer than in San Diego County.

Researchers were unsure of the reasons for the difference.

In Orange County, the cost of treating those patients was $57 million.
STDs strike 1 million California youths

October 10, 2007
By Troy Anderson

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The report comes as health officials have expressed growing concerns about serious complications STDs can cause. The human papillomavirus, or HPV, is linked to cervical and anal cancer. Other STDs can increase the chance of contracting HIV by two to six times.

“If you look at the overall numbers, the biggest impacts are from two diseases,” said Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. “One is HIV and the other is HPV.”

Fielding said the data also highlight the “hidden epidemic” of chlamydia and gonorrhea.

“This disproportionately affects young people and has a lot of secondary effects,” Fielding said. “For some women, chlamydia leads to infertility.”

Researchers found the number of cases in Ventura County totaled 10,270 and treatment cost $9.9 million. In San Bernardino County, the number of cases totaled 75,606 and treatment costs $50 million.

From 2000 to 2005 in Los Angeles County, the number of reported cases of gonorrhea jumped from 7,199 to 10,494; syphilis more than tripled, from 336 to 1,213; and chlamydia cases increased from 30,546 to 38,862.

“But HIV is really what we are most concerned about,” said Dr. Peter Kerndt, director of the county’s Sexually Transmitted Disease Program. “We know the rates of HIV in the younger age groups and among minorities are increasing. That’s where the epidemic is growing the fastest.”

Kerndt noted several reasons for the increases, including better screening of youths covered under managed care insurance plans.

Also, today’s youths generally are more sexually active, sometimes have multiple sexual partners and simultaneously place themselves at higher risk by using drugs and alcohol, Kerndt said.

Health officials are also concerned about recent increases in different types of reported STDs among youths, including HIV, syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhea.

Although HIV became a reportable disease last year, no statistics are currently available and HPV is not a reportable disease.
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

But health officials are especially concerned about HPV, noting that more than 90 percent of people who have the disease have no symptoms.

Although research suggests that most immune systems will eliminate HPV infection within a year or two, about 10 percent of people remain infected for much longer, possibly for life.

A vaccine that now protects against four HPV types - which cause about 70 percent of cervical cancer cases and 90 percent of genital warts - is now approved for females ages 11-26.

“If you have private insurance, you can be vaccinated by your private physician,” Kerndt said. “If they are eligible, they can receive vaccines in publicly funded clinics.”

About half of hepatitis B cases are also sexually transmitted.

Infected people often have no symptoms, but it can lead to fatal liver disease. A vaccine is also available for hepatitis B now.

“If youth are having sex, they should make sure they have protection,” Fielding said. “Condoms, for most of these diseases but not all, are the first line of protection.”
OctOber 2007

The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

Report finds 1 million cases of STDs among young people

October 10, 2007

OAKLAND, Calif.—A new analysis finds there were an estimated 1 million cases of sexually transmitted diseases among young Californians in 2005.

“It is clear we are living in the dark about how common STDs are and how many kids acquire them in a given year,” said epidemiologist Petra Jerman of the Public Health Institute in Oakland, who led the study reported in the California Journal of Health Promotion.

The number of infections was not known before because many do not have to be reported to health authorities and those that are supposed to be reported often are not.

Jerman and her colleagues estimated incidence of STDs using a computer model developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC researchers reported in 2004 that 9.1 million new STDs occurred nationwide among 15- to 24-year-olds in the year 2000.

Jerman and her colleagues estimated that there were 1.1 million new cases of STDs in California in that age group in 2005. They found the estimated cost of treating the infections was about $1 billion annually.

The number one infection reported in the study was human papillomavirus (HPV), at 590,000 cases followed by trichomoniasis with 250,000 cases.

Also published:
S.T.D. Treatment Cost

October 10, 2007

SAN DIEGO - The cost of treating 15-24-year-olds for venereal disease in San Diego County in 2005 was $110 million, second only to Los Angeles county.

The estimated 85,000 teens and young adults diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases were lower per capita in San Diego than the state average—17 percent, compared with 20 percent. However, diseases diagnosed in the county’s youths and young adults are more expensive to treat.

“San Diego (County) has a greater number of chlamydia, gonorrhea and AIDS cases in the state, and that drives the cost,” Petra Jerman, a spokeswoman for the Oakland-based Public Health Institute, which issued the report, said.

Those diseases are more expensive to treat than syphilis, human papillomavirus, genital herpes, hepatitis B and trichomoniasis, Jerman said.

She said 360,000 cases were reported in Los Angeles County, costing it $390 million.

Statewide, an estimated 1.1 million STD cases were reported among young people in 2005, the last year for which figures were available. Direct medical costs totaled $1.1 billion.

The research was funded by the California Wellness Foundation.

One oddity discovered by researchers: Orange County, similar to San Diego County in population and many other demographics, reported 53,566 STD cases among young people, almost 32,000 fewer than in San Diego County. The Researchers couldn’t account for the difference.

In Orange County, the cost of treating those patients was $57 million.

The complete study is available at http://teenbirths.phi.org
The rate of sexually transmitted diseases is raging out of control in Sacramento County, according to a new study.

The Public Health Institute reported that Sacramento County has the third highest rate of STDs among all counties in the state. People who are 15 to 24 years old are hardest-hit. Researchers estimated that 40 percent of Sacramento’s teens and young adults have an STD such as chlamydia, HIV, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, hepatitis B and HPV -- human papillomavirus which causes cervical cancer.

Sacramento County Public Health Officer Dr. Glennah Trochet said part of the problem is that the county doesn’t have enough places for people to be tested and educated about STD prevention.

News10 reporter Karen Massie is talking to students and Planned Parenthood for their opinions on why the county has such a high rate of STD. She will have more information later.
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

County Spends $110 Million for Venereal Disease Treatment

October 10, 2007

SAN DIEGO -- The cost of treating 15 - 24-year-olds for venereal disease in San Diego County in 2005 was $110 million, second only to Los Angeles County, it was reported Wednesday.

The estimated 85,000 teens and young adults diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases were lower per capita in San Diego than the state average -- 17 percent, compared with 20 percent. However, diseases diagnosed in the county’s youths and young adults are more expensive to treat, The San Diego Union-Tribune reported.

“San Diego (County) has a greater number of chlamydia, gonorrhea and AIDS cases in the state, and that drives the cost,” Petra Jerman, a spokeswoman for the Oakland-based Public Health Institute, which issued the report, told the newspaper. Those diseases are more expensive to treat than syphilis, human papillomavirus, genital herpes, hepatitis B and trichomoniasis, Jerman said.

She said 360,000 cases were reported in Los Angeles County, costing the county $390 million.

Statewide, an estimated 1.1 million STD cases were reported among young people in 2005, the last year for which figures were available. Direct medical costs totaled $1.1 billion, the Union-Tribune reported.

The research was funded by the California Wellness Foundation.

One oddity discovered by researchers: Orange County, similar to San Diego County in population and many other demographics, reported 53,566 STD cases among young people, almost 32,000 fewer than in San Diego County. The Researchers couldn’t account for the difference, the Union-Tribune reported.

In Orange County, the cost of treating those patients was $57 million, the Union-Tribune reported.
Highest Rate of Occurrences Is In L.A. County

October 10, 2007

A new report on the rates of sexually transmitted diseases in California has alarmed officials. And they’re especially concerned about who is getting STDs.

The report by public health officials reveals a startling number of young Californians have STDs. The highest rate of occurrences are in Los Angeles County.

A new state report says one in every four or five young people have had a sexually transmitted disease in 2005. Among the youth, this news isn’t shocking.

“I’m not really surprised, you know, considering how people behave nowadays in society, and you know they just go do about whatever it is that they please,” said student Arobo Baiki.

“By people not using protection, and not being smart about what they do -- yeah, I’m not surprised at all,” said student Veahnns Abbdi.

The study in the California Journal of Health Promotion says one million people between the ages of 15 and 24 had an STD, with the largest number of new infections -- about 362,000 -- in L.A. County.

Most of the infections included the transmission of the human papillomavirus (HPV), genital infections, and chlamydia. “There’s a concern that things are getting worse and going in the wrong direction,” said Dr. Peter Katona of the UCLA Medical Center.

Infectious disease expert Dr. Katona says the report is based on a computer model, so the numbers are extrapolated -- not reported. However, he says the findings underscore the importance of improving reporting methods and the screening of at-risk populations.

“It is very important from a public health perspective that they stay on top of this, the funding is there to be able to let them do the work that they need to do,” said Dr. Katona.

Young folks say they’ve noticed a troubling laxity in their friends’ attitude towards sex.

“I think people just aren’t having safe sex, and I know that from friends and such,” said student Raffael Nahapetian. As for what should parents do with this information, Dr. Katona says talking to your teenagers is only a start.

“If a parent leads an ethical, good life and teaches their kids to be inquisitive and careful, that’s more important than telling their kids to be sexually careful when they’ve already reached a sexually active age,” said Dr. Katona.

Experts say they were also surprised by the high rates of gonorrhea among young people, as it is considered one of the more dangerous STDs.
Sexually Transmitted Infections Among California Youth: Estimated Incidence and Direct Medical Cost is our site of the day

A study just published in the “California Journal of Health Promotion” shows that there is an epidemic of STDs--sexually transmitted diseases—that has profound implications for legislation on the Governor’s desk that is being vigorously opposed by the religious right in this state. As you read this study, you may also want to look about what we had to say about SB 94 (Kuehl) Family Planning Services Bill on Governor Schwarzenegger’s Desk--”One of the Most Important of the Year”--The Cost of Doing Nothing is Too High” two weeks ago.

“Sexually Transmitted Infections Among California Youth: Estimated Incidence and Direct Medical Cost” is a 12 page report by researchers of the Oakland based Public Health Institute’s (PHI) Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development.

• The new cases and associated medical costs of eight major STDs (chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, HPV, hepatitis B, trichomoniasis and HIV) among 15 to 24-year-olds ranged from a low of 82 cases in Alpine and Sierra counties, at a cost of $38,000, to a high of 360,000 cases in Los Angeles County, at a cost of $390 million.

• “The estimated number of new cases and their associated costs illustrate that the STD epidemic among California youth remains largely hidden. This epidemic is like an iceberg — what you see is just a small part of what you have,” said Dr. Petra Jerman, PHI scientist.

“Sexually Transmitted Infections Among California Youth: Estimated Incidence and Direct Medical Cost” is a 12 page report by researchers of the Oakland based Public Health Institute’s (PHI) Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development.

• “The estimated number of new cases and their associated costs illustrate that the STD epidemic among California youth remains largely hidden. This epidemic is like an iceberg — what you see is just a small part of what you have,” said Dr. Petra Jerman, PHI scientist.

According to Jerman, state and county policymakers can use this new information in reassessing the adequacy of current resources to prevent STDs among California’s youth.

The study, including complete charts and background material on STDs, can be found at teenbirths.phi.org.

The Public Health Institute is an independent, nonprofit organization. The study was funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation.
Young Californians Have High Rate of Sexually Transmitted Infections

October 10, 2007

An estimated 1.1 million California residents ages 15 to 24 had a sexually transmitted infection in 2005, accounting for more than $1.1 billion in direct medical costs, according to a study released Wednesday by the Oakland-based Public Health Institute, the San Diego Union-Tribune reports (Clark, San Diego Union-Tribune, 10/10).

The study marks the first time the method for calculating sexually transmitted infections has been applied at the state and county level (Russell, San Francisco Chronicle, 10/10).

Researchers focused on eight major infections:
• Chlamydia;
• Gonorrhea;
• Syphilis;
• Genital herpes;
• Human papillomavirus;
• Hepatitis B;
• HIV; and
• Trichomoniasis (Steffens, Contra Costa Times, 10/10).

Researchers used a computer model developed by CDC to calculate the estimate (Maugh II, Los Angeles Times, 10/10).

The findings are nearly 10 times higher than previous data on 15- to 24-year-olds in California (Anderson, Los Angeles Daily News, 10/9).

The incidences of many of the infections previously were unknown because many are not required to be reported to county or state officials (Reese, Sacramento Bee, 10/10).

Other infections are not reported because of incomplete testing, underreporting and treating infections without a confirmatory test (Los Angeles Times, 10/10).

Petra Jerman, a researcher at the institute, said the number of cases and their associated costs “illustrate that the [sexually transmitted infection] epidemic among California youths remains largely hidden” (Los Angeles Daily News, 10/9).
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

Sexual Transmitted Diseases Running Wild in California Again

October 10, 2007

In a quiet way, the State is getting sick with preventable diseases. This has been going on for a long time, it just did not start in the past 60 days.

Yet government and the media has not been reporting it to the public.

Why do you think this has been kept from the public?
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

STDs hidden epidemic in county

October 11, 2007
By Tom Kisken

The numbers are startling, but not to public health officers.

Of 113,000 teenagers and young adults in Ventura County, there may have been 10,270 incidences of sexually transmitted diseases in 2005, according to a new study that suggests the diseases are a huge and hidden epidemic throughout California.

Statistical formulas previously used by the federal government show that the number of cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV, HPV and similar diseases could be nearly nine times greater than the actual cases reported to health officials, said researchers at the Public Health Institute in Oakland.

Their study, published in the California Journal of Health Promotion, indicated there might have been more than 1 million such cases affecting young people throughout the state in 2005. That’s 10 times more than the number reported.

The numbers are huge, but Dr. Robert Levin, Ventura County public health officer, believes they paint a painfully accurate portrait.

“It tells us something we in the health department already know,” he said. “It’s a real problem. It’s a very common problem. We as a society are failing in teaching our young people that it’s important to take precautions.”

The study focuses on people 15 to 24 and looks at diseases that have to be reported such as HIV and chlamydia, but also diseases that do not, including human papillomaviruses (HPV), genital herpes and trichomoniasis. Using formulas developed by researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, scientists built ballpark estimates to try to gauge how common the diseases are and how costly.

The study estimates the state spent more than $1.1 billion in treating and diagnosing sexually transmitted diseases in young people in 2005. Researchers said as much as $9.9 million was spent in Ventura County.

“More money should be spent on prevention,” said the study’s co-author, Petra Jerman, referring to screening and education programs. “Prevention saves money. If you prevent it, you wouldn’t have to be treated.”

Jean Borowsky is a school nurse and chairwoman for health services at Simi Valley Unified School District. There, students learn about sexually transmitted diseases in a battery of programs that begin as early as the sixth grade.

“I think we can do more, but we don’t have time to do more,” she said, noting that nurses are stretched thin dealing with sick kids, diabetes and myriad other issues.

Levin believes schools can be stopped by a lack of funding and that other prevention messages can be affected by perceptions of morality. He worries about kids being told only to say no.

“The problem with abstinence only is not the abstinence, it’s the only’ part,” he said. “Abstinence is a valid technique, but it has to be a part of a realistic approach to dealing with sexuality in teens. It has to work along with education.”

Dr. Cary Savitch, an infectious disease specialist in Ventura, said the study’s numbers could be inflated because many of the people may have more than one disease or recurring cases. And because there’s no similar data for previous years, there’s no way to know if the number of cases is rising.

The study suggests there may have been 2,900 new cases of HIV in 2005 throughout California for people 15 to 24. But
only 516 cases were reported to health officials. That’s not only alarming but also a compelling reason to screen everyone for the disease, Savitch said.

“It means that one in six people are detected and five people in the age group are going undetected and spreading the disease,” he said.

County health officials said that 1,165 sexually transmitted diseases were reported in 2005 for people 15 to 24, compared to the study’s estimate of more than 10,000 total cases. The gap was even bigger statewide. Researchers estimated 1.1 million sexually transmitted diseases during the year, compared to about 102,000 reported cases.

“We got this, and we were like holy moley, it’s 10 times higher,’” said Jerman. She contended not nearly enough is being done.

“We’re basically living in the dark. Most of the STDs are hidden. They’re not reported. People just don’t know that they exist.”
STDs among youth rising
Monterey County had 8,500 new cases in 2005, statistics show

October 11, 2007

Sexually transmitted diseases, largely unreported, are costing California more than a billion dollars a year, according to a study published in the California Journal of Health Promotion.

Researchers at the Public Health Institute’s Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development concluded that the annual number of newly acquired STDs among California youth exceeded 1 million cases in 2005.

The estimate is an astonishing 10 times higher than the actual number of cases reported that year, indicating that previously available statistics on the number of STDs in California do not provide the full picture.

“The estimated number of new cases and their associated costs illustrate that the STD epidemic among California youth remains largely hidden,” said Dr. Petra Jerman, PHI scientist. “This epidemic is like an iceberg - what you see is just a small part of what you have.”

According to PHI statistics, there were nearly 8,500 new cases in Monterey County in 2005, with estimated medical costs of $7 million.

Monterey County has about 66,700 residents in the 15-to-24-year-old age range, the PHI said, meaning nearly 13 percent of the age group contracted an STD.

The researchers employed statistical estimation methods developed at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to estimate the number of new cases and associated medical costs of eight major STDs - chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, HPV, hepatitis B, trichomoniasis and HIV - among 15-to 24-year-olds in each of California’s 58 counties. Incidence and costs ranged from a low of 82 cases in Alpine and Sierra counties, at a cost of $38,000, to a high of 360,000 cases in Los Angeles County, at a cost of $390 million.

State and county policymakers can use this new information in reassessing the adequacy of current resources to prevent STDs among California’s youth, Jerman said.

The Public Health Institute is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting health, well-being and quality of life. The study was funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation.
Over 1 Million Young Californians With Sexually Transmitted Infections Says New Study

October 11, 2007

A new US study suggests that in 2005 there were 1.1 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among young Californians. These included diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, HPV and HIV and accounted for a state-wide direct medical cost exceeding 1 billion dollars, said the authors.

Published in the Californian Journal of Health Promotion the study is the work of researchers from the Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development at the Public Health Institute (PHI) in Oakland, California.

Dr Petra Jerman, study author and scientist at PHI said these figures constituted an epidemic of which, like an iceberg, only a small part is visible.

“The estimated number of new cases and their associated costs illustrate that the STD epidemic among California youth remains largely hidden,” said Jerman.

Jerman and colleagues said their goal was to estimate the incidence rate and direct medical cost of new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in young people in each of California’s 58 counties. This should give policy makers and local healthcare providers good quality information to help prevent and control sexually transmitted infections.

The authors used methods developed by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to estimate statewide numbers of new incidences of 8 STIs in California in 2005 among people ranging from 15 to 24 years of age.

The 8 types of infection included in the study were: chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis B, trichomoniasis, and HIV.

Using national estimates of the average lifetime cost per case of each type of STI, Jerman and her colleagues also worked out their direct medical cost of by county to help local health authorities use information more relevant to their particular area.

The summarized results showed that:

• In California in 2005, there were 1.1 million estimated cases of STIs in young people.
• The total direct medical cost of these cases was 1.1 billion dollars.
• The estimated number of new STI cases ranged from a low of 82 in Alpine and Sierra counties to a high of 360,000 in Los Angeles County.
• The associated costs ranged from 38 thousand to 390 million dollars respectively.
• The most prevalent STI was HPV, human papillomavirus, with an estimated 590,000 cases in young Californians in 2005.
• The lowest incidence of new cases was in syphilis, for which the researchers estimated there were 380 cases.

The estimation methods were different for each STI the researchers looked at because of the range of sources of information and the types of informed assumptions they had to make in order to tease out and match their precise criteria for age range and the fact they were looking only at sexually trasmitted infections.

For example, take HIV, with an estimated number of 2,900 new cases in 2005. The authors sourced figures from studies using data from the Office of AIDS at the California Department of Health Services. This gave them an estimated range of 6,788 to 8,988 new cases of HIV in California each year. So they took the midpoint of the range (7,888), and with reference to other research papers, assumed that 75 percent of HIV infections are acquired sexually and that 50 percent of
these are acquired by people under 25.

In their discussion the authors wrote that the most commonly used marker for STIs is the number of cases reported to local health authorities. Backed by their analysis, they argued that this method underestimated their true incidence and the discrepancy is most likely due to incomplete screening of at risk populations, under reporting of infections and failure to confirm through testing that treatments have been effective.

The authors highlighted some limitations of their analysis, including the fact they estimated the geographic distribution of some STIs on the known distribution figures for other STIs. They said this was not unreasonable because population size is the “main determinant of the STI distribution”. However, this does not take into account the fact that some STIs may have different geographic patterns to others. This could introduce a small amount of error in the distribution of the estimated cases of STIs among the different counties.

The authors concluded that:

“These estimates illustrate the widespread and frequently underreported incidence and costs of youth STIs in California and its counties, and provide the foundation for a comprehensive assessment of youth STI prevention needs.”
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

The Kids Aren’t All Right

October 11, 2007

Doomed to repeat - if not exceed - the failures of their previous generations, the youth of today are spreading sexually transmitted diseases at an alarming rate, the LA Times reported yesterday.

In fact the next time a college girl giggles when, in the heat of the moment, you pull her hair and call her a dirty dirty girl - the joke might be on you, holmes.

About 1 million Californians between the ages of 15 and 24 had an STD in 2005, LA county researchers said, summarizing what they have learned from a new study. Los Angeles county had the largest number of new infections with 361,876. San Diego County had 85,523, San Bernardino had 75,606 and Orange County had 53,566, the Times said. The cost of treating that many new infections is about $1 billion.

“We were expecting high numbers . . . even to us,” said epidemiologist Petra Jerman of the Public Health Institute in Oakland, who led the new study reported in the California Journal of Health Promotion. “It is clear we are living in the dark about how common STDs are and how many kids acquire them in a given year.”

The report also highlights the large number of new cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea -- which are associated with HIV and are considered to be among the most serious STDs -- among people age 15 to 24, said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

“It’s really disturbing that we have not been able to make more progress with that,” he said. “We don’t have young people using protection when they are having sex.” - LA Times

Here at LAist we know that some of our readers are between the ages of 15 and 24, if not younger. So here are some tips from us to you, since we’re much much older, and you don’t want to make the mistakes that we, uh, have heard about.

By “we” I mean me, this is my advice for young people who participate in sex.

Use a condom every time you have sex. Even if you love the person. Even if they’re hot or cute or claim to be a virgin. If someone complains that the sex is no good with the condom, either you two are doing it wrong or you two aren’t meant for each other.

Also realize that people have been known to lie about things, particularly when it comes to sexual practices and partners. And believe it or not but some people might be embarrassed by their sexual history and condition - likewise some might be ignorant to it. Get tested frequently and require your partners to do the same.

Yes you can trust your sweetie, but unless you’ve exchanged vows, learn how to rock the condom. Every time. Practice makes perfect and this should be something that’s fun to practice.

Some may huff and puff but if you hold your ground they will respect you for being clean and safe and smart and want to bone you that much more. If not they’re dumbshits and you should really reconsider why you want them on top of you.
Sexually transmitted diseases or STDs among young people in the United States usually goes unreported and has been found to be far higher than expected in the state of California. A study by the Public Health Institute of Oakland has estimated that the number of STD cases among 15 to 24-year-olds in California is more than 10 times higher than those which are reported. The deputy county health officer Dr. Lisa Hernandez has stated that “We only see the tip of the iceberg.” Many experts believe that this is the trend across the entire United States as the majority of STD cases among young people to unreported. The study looked at 8 types of STDs including chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, HPV, hepatitis B, HIV, and trichomoniasis. Hernandez stated that “Symptoms often are not reported or not diagnosed.” The study shows a great need to increase health-care access to young people in that age group who may be more prone to skipping checkups with doctors. The study states young people need to practice safer sex practices.

Also published:

OverTheLimit
Number STDs higher than expected among teens
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

Study: STDs taking toll on state’s youth

October 13, 2007

A new study released this week calls sexually transmitted diseases a “hidden epidemic” in California, and estimates there were 2,017 new cases in Humboldt County in 2005 that came with a $1.8 million price tag for treatment.

The study by the Oakland-based Public Health Institute used methods developed at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to estimate there were more than 1 million new STD cases statewide in 2005 among residents age 15-24, and calculated treatment costs at $1 billion.

"The estimated number of new cases and their associated costs illustrate that the STD epidemic among California youth remains largely hidden,” Dr. Petra Jerman, who supervised the study, said in a news release. “This epidemic is like an iceberg -- what you see is just a small part of what you have.”

Jerman said the estimates can be used by state and county policy makers when looking at how to allocate resources to prevent the spread of STDs among the state’s youth.

There are four reportable STDs in California: Chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and HIV. The study considered an additional four: Genital herpes, HPV, hepatitis B and trichomoniasis.

Local statistics show the number of gonorrhea cases in Humboldt County have jumped in recent years. There have been 48 cases reported between January and September, compared to 16 total last year and 21 total in 2005, according to the county’s public health department.

Several years ago, Humboldt County ranked No. 5 statewide in the number of chlamydia cases per capita. While the raw numbers have remained steady -- so far this year, the county has seen 271 chlamydia cases -- the county’s overall ranking has dropped since the last one was released in 2005.

According to information from public health, 75 percent of people with chlamydia and 50 percent of people with gonorrhea show no symptoms, and are unaware they have a STD unless they are screened.
STDs among teens

October 15, 2007

A NEW STUDY FROM California’s Public Health Institute gave us some very disturbing news concerning sexually transmitted diseases among the state’s teenagers and young adults. According to the report, each year in California people ages 15 to 24 suffer from more than 1.1 million new STD cases. This is a staggering figure.

With these new cases, the burden on our medical industry is enormous. The report estimates that these infections add up to more than $1 billion in lifetime medical costs. It’s obvious we have dropped the ball on educating our youths and now the ramifications of our failure are coming full circle.

The California Journal of Health Promotion said the study focused on eight major STDs and used mathematical models to calculate the incidence of infections among the 15-24 age group county by county. The numbers from 2005 show 62,417 new STD cases in Alameda County, 28,519 in Contra Costa, 15,440 in Solano and 8,642 in San Mateo.

If these figures seem alarming, consider this -- not all STD cases are reported. For instance, human papillomavirus, or HPV, is not subject to mandatory reporting although it’s easy to transmit and can lead to cervical cancer.

In fact, there seems to be confusion among physicians on what must be reported and what is private, according to Francie Wise, communicable disease program chief for Contra Costa Public Health. In addition, Wise said, “patients say ‘please don’t report it.’”

This is a collapse of communication. Not enough is being communicated to young teens about the danger of catching STDs and how common these diseases have become. Also, physicians must have a clear-cut understanding on what should be reported. We fear the numbers in this study are far short of what’s really out there.

It boils down to sex education. Pushing abstinence-only behavior is nothing more than a pipe-dream. Our youths are having sex, and unfortunately, it’s unprotected sex. How about instead of spending billions to treat STDs, we invest millions into preventing them?

We must come up with innovative programs at the local, state and national levels and education tools that youths will listen to and honestly take to heart -- not boring videos in some classroom or silly scare tactics.

The numbers indicate we need to take a realistic look at an epidemic among the youths right under our noses. We need to stop the spread of STDs now.
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

Eye-opening accuracy
New legislation may address STD rates

October 16, 2007

The figures are astounding: Nearly a quarter of Solano County’s high school and college age residents may have suffered new cases of sexually transmitted diseases in 2005, according to a study released last week by the California Public Health Institute.

Researchers were quick to point out that the figures don’t necessarily represent any increase in disease rates - just more accurate calculations.

By applying the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s new method of calculating STD rates to California and its counties, researchers estimated that 20.6 percent of the state’s 15- to 24-year-olds suffered more than 1.1 million new infections that year - more than 10 times higher than previously believed. The cases represent a lifetime treatment cost of $1 billion.

The new calculations showed that in Solano County, the 15,440 STD cases were equivalent to 23.8 percent of the young population. Lifetime treatments costs were estimated at $13 million.

The study focused on eight major STDs: chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, HPV, hepatitis B, trichomoniasis and HIV. Health care providers are required to report to the state some diseases, such as HIV. Others, such as HPV, or human papillomavirus, which may account for more than half of the estimated cases in the new report, are not subject to mandatory reporting. Hence the need to find better ways to estimate their frequency.

Researchers hope that developing a more realistic outlook on the frequency of STDs might result in more practical measures to detect, treat and prevent their spread. It is fitting, then, that among the bills signed into law by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger this past weekend were two that could have some effect on this problem.

Senate Bill 94 will increase the amount that MediCal pays to providers of family planning services - services that include identifying and treating STDs. The additional $24 million going to those providers may bring up to $64 million in additional federal funds to the clinics, enabling them to resume services that have been cut in recent years as they struggled to make do on a reimbursement rate that hadn’t changed since 1985. To his credit, Solano’s own state Sen. Michael Machado helped push this bill through the Legislature.

Assembly Bill 629, the “Sexual Health Education Accountability Act,” requires that sex education in all public schools be comprehensive, medically accurate and age appropriate. Accurate education has helped California make good progress in reducing the teenage pregnancy rate. Perhaps more attention on STDs in the curriculum can help slow their spread. Unfortunately, the governor chose to veto Assembly Bill 1429, a measure carried by Solano County Assemblywoman Noreen Evans that would have required most insurance companies to cover the costs of vaccinating women against HPV, which can lead to cervical cancer. The vaccine is essential to reducing future rates of HPV.

In a signing statement attached to the veto, the governor said: “While I support increased access to preventive services, I cannot support this bill as it may contribute to rising premiums. Further, a mandate is not necessary as this vaccine is already routinely provided by health plans and insurers. Mandating its coverage is unnecessary, restrictive and may increase costs.” It’s questionable reasoning, though. If health care providers are already providing this vaccine, then there should be no increase in costs.

Still, two out of three isn’t bad. And with a better picture of the STD situation among young people, coupled with funds and mandates to address it, perhaps California can reduce the infection rate.
Burke promotes abstinence
L.A. County supervisor cites rising youth STD rates.

October 16, 2007
By Troy Anderson

Breaking ranks with other officials who for years have promoted condom use among the young to protect them from sexually transmitted diseases, Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke will urge youth today to abstain from sex altogether. Citing new statistics showing one in five county youth contracted sexually-transmitted diseases in 2005, Burke will join others at a pro-abstinence rally outside the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration building. Burke, along with actress and AIDS activist Sheryl Lee Ralph, platinum-selling gospel duo Mary Mary, comedian Michael Colyer and youth from various community-based organizations, will speak after the morning rally.

The rally is designed to promote local participation in the national “Parents Speak Up” campaign to encourage parents to initiate the sometimes difficult conversation with their pre-teen and teenage children about the importance of abstinence. “It’s very important for parents to talk to their pre-teen and teenage children about the importance of abstinence and the risks of getting some sexually-transmitted disease,” Burke said. “We realize teens are often under a great deal of pressure, but parents need to get in there first and explain the real problems, the possibility that their entire life will be affected and that there are diseases at present we have nothing in terms of a cure for.”

Burke decided to call for the rally and press conference after a recent report by the Oakland-based Public Health Institute estimated more than 1 million youths in the state contracted STDs that cost the state more than $1 billion in 2005. In the county, about one in five youth ages 15 to 24 contracted STDs that year.

“We at Planned Parenthood also believe it’s critically important that parents speak to their teens about matters of sex, relationships and values and that they convey information about abstinence and about how teens can protect themselves once they become sexually active,” said Mary-Jane Wagle, president and chief executive officer of Planned Parenthood of Los Angeles. “Not giving that vital information leaves teens in the dark and leads to the kind of public health crisis that the Public Health Institute study documents.”

In recent years, the number of STD cases has increased substantially at the county, state and national levels, including large increases in chlamydia, gonorrhea and HIV cases, officials say. By the 12th grade, 65 percent of high school students have had sexual intercourse, and one in five has had four or more partners, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Many STDs can cause serious health problems, including pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, ectopic pregnancy and increased risk of HIV.

Johanna Nestor, director of the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs at DHHS, said President Bush initiated the “Parents Speak Up” campaign in his state-of-the-union speech in 2004, urging parents to talk to their children about waiting to have sex.

“The message is to get parents to talk to their children early and often about waiting to have sex,” Nestor said. In recent decades, a national political and philosophical battle has raged over whether children should be told to wait to have sex until marriage, or instructed to use condoms to prevent STDs. Republicans have long called for abstinence education, primarily based on moral reasons.

Jennifer Walsh, an associate professor of political science at Azusa Pacific University, said more and more officials nationwide are now touting the practical benefits of abstinence.

“We’ve now seen, especially in California, 20 years or more of condom-related sexual education and yet that doesn’t seem to be working,” Walsh said. “We are not getting a change in behavior. We are not seeing STD rates decline. As these statistics indicate, they are increasing. That also suggests when you have sex education programs that focus on condom use that clearly is not enough to get students to use them or to avoid other types of risky behaviors.”
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

October 17, 2007

A recent study by Oakland’s Public Health Institute Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development found that the annual number of sexually transmitted diseases among California’s youth is much higher than expected and will cost the state billions of dollars in treatment each year.

In the study, researchers found there were an estimated 1.12 million new cases of eight major STDs, including Chlamydia, Gonorrhea and Human Papillomavirus (HPV), among 15 to 24 year olds in California in 2005—at an estimated direct medical cost of $1.11 billion annually. These costs include doctor visits, diagnostic testing, drug treatments, and treatment for acute infections, as well as infections left untreated.

Santa Clara County has 34,090 new cases of STDs within this age group, according to the study.

“They’re not being safe in terms of using protection,” said Buu Thai, public affairs director of Planned Parenthood Mar Monte - San Jose/Coastal Region, referring to the youth within the demographic.

She said these numbers represent 15.5 percent of the population within this age group, leaving Santa Clara County to foot a $29 million medical bill that year.

In the study, which was published in the September issue of the California Journal of Health Promotion, the findings are 10 times higher than the number of cases actually reported in 2005, and suggests that California is facing a hidden epidemic when it comes to STDs.

Thai said these cases largely go unreported because of a lack of education, adding that most young people rely too heavily on birth control pills. She said some males don’t think they have to wear a condom if their sexual partner is taking birth control pills— but she warns that birth control does not protect against STDs.

“When I was in college, I knew many students who had STDs,” said 27-year-old Lara Borowski, an SJSU graduate student studying community health education.

“People don’t know about it, but it happens all the time,” she said.

Borowski, who has been in a relationship for the past four years, said she uses birth control pills but not condoms.

Despite the rising number of STDs, Thai said the rate of unintended pregnancies has gone down “tremendously,” by 24 percent, indicating that this demographic is very educated when it comes to birth control but not when it comes to STDs.

“About 80 percent of the people don’t know that they’re infected with an STD because there’s no symptoms,” said Melinda Chu-Yang, a peer health education coordinator who specializes in sexual health.

Chu-Yang provides free one-on-one sexual health counseling for students on everything from what the most effective form of birth control is (“hormonal methods,” which are 99.9 percent effective if used correctly) to how to tell your partner if you’ve been diagnosed with an STD.

The most common symptom of an STD? Not having a symptom at all, Chu-Yang said.

“That’s the reason why the rates are so high,” she said.

“There’s always that risk,” said Nick Underwood, a senior liberal studies major, about having sex with people one doesn’t...
know that well. Underwood, who said he’s been to the student health center for an STD screening before, said students need to be wise about having sex, especially when it comes to using protection.

Underwood goes to the campus Condom Co-Op, a free service that provides students with condoms. His friend, Edgar Raygoza, a senior international business major, believes that college students should take advantage of the resources on campus when it comes to sexual health.

“You have to worry about your health,” Raygoza said.

While unintended pregnancy rates are pretty low, Chu-Yang said rates of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea are fairly common on college campuses.

Of the number of Chlamydia tests performed in the Student Health Center between April 1, 2006 and March 31, 2007, 2.56 percent were positive, said Dr. Cecilia Manibo, the medical chief of staff at the Student Health Center in an e-mail. Out of the number of Gonorrhea tests, less than 1 percent were positive.

“We cannot determine the prevalence rate of these infections on campus, as many students obtain health care off campus,” Manibo said in the e-mail.

She said there were 849 visits for STD checks within this time period, but cautions that the number doesn’t reflect how many actual students were checked because some of them may have come in more than once to be evaluated.

While unprotected sex is addressed during individual visits to the SJSU Student Health Center, clinicians do not compile data on this information, Manibo said.

According to the California Department of Health Services, the rate of Chlamydia in Santa Clara County has increased by 24.4 percent, and Gonorrhea by 78 percent, between 2001 and 2005 - with women between the ages of 15-19 having the highest Chlamydia rates.

Furthermore, syphilis in males shot up 81 percent between 2003 and 2004 despite a consistent decrease throughout the ‘90s.

“Actually, it’s rising throughout America, so it’s not just in college,” said Dr. Oscar Battle, SJSU Health Education Coordinator, who doesn’t necessarily believe the rise of STDs indicates an epidemic.

He said there are many resources available for students on campus.

Students, he said, can make an appointment to see a clinician at the student health center for an STD/HIV screening. Chu-Yang also provides students with free HIV testing.

Battle also encourages students to arm themselves with knowledge before becoming sexually active.

“We want them to be good health consumers,” he said.

How often students should get tested, Thai said, largely depends on the level of sexual activity that person engages in - and how many partners they have. She said having protected sex - namely wearing condoms - is very important when it comes to safeguarding oneself against the spread of STDs.
U.S. teens have higher rate of sexual transmitted diseases

October 17, 2007

U.S. teens between the ages of 15 and 19 have a higher rate of sexual transmitted diseases (STD) than any other age group, according to a new study.

The study by the Public Health Institute Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development also found half of all new HIV cases are black females 15 years of age or older and Hispanic teen pregnancy is 68 percent higher than the rate among non-Hispanic teens.

In order to promote abstinence, a national campaign “Parents Speak Up” was underway, according to Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke.

Citing the study, Burke said the number of new STDs among California youth is greater than previously thought.

He called for local participation in the national campaign designed to encourage parents to initiate conversations with their children about abstinence.

James Bolden, press deputy for Burke, said, “We just can’t be silent about what we’re seeing. We have to encourage parents to talk to their children and tell them they face tremendous risks if involved with sex... (There’s) nothing wrong today to say to young people to stay away (from sex).”

“We approve of any effort that begins with abstinence and goes from there. But if you begin and end with abstinence you are putting young people’s life in danger,” she said.

Also published:
Burke to promote youth abstinence at rally today
Supervisor cites sobering statistics on STDs

October 17, 2007
By Troy Anderson

Breaking ranks with other officials who for years have promoted condom use among the young to protect them from sexually transmitted diseases, Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke will urge youths today to abstain from sex altogether.

Citing new statistics showing one in five county youths contracted sexually transmitted diseases in 2005, Burke will join others at a pro-abstinence rally outside the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration building.

Burke, along with actress and AIDS activist Sheryl Lee Ralph, platinum-selling gospel duo Mary Mary, comedian Michael Colyer and youths from various community-based organizations, will speak after the morning rally.

The rally is designed to promote local participation in the national “Parents Speak Up” campaign, which encourages parents to initiate conversations with their pre-teen and teenage children about the importance of abstinence.

“It’s very important for parents to talk to their pre-teen and teenage children about the importance of abstinence and the risks of getting some sexually-transmitted disease,” Burke said. “We realize teens are often under a great deal of pressure, but parents need to get in there first and explain the real problems.”

Burke decided to call for the rally and press conference after a recent report by the Oakland-based Public Health Institute estimated more than 1 million youths in the state contracted sexual diseases that cost the state more than $1 billion in 2005. In the county, about one in five young people from 15 to 24 contracted diseases that year.

“We at Planned Parenthood also believe it’s critically important that parents speak to their teens about matters of sex, relationships and values and that they convey information about abstinence and about how teens can protect themselves once they become sexually active,” said Mary-Jane Wagle, president and chief executive officer of Planned Parenthood of Los Angeles. “Not giving that vital information leaves teens in the dark and leads to the kind of public health crisis that the Public Health Institute study documents.”

In recent years, the number of sexually transmitted disease cases has increased substantially at the county, state and national levels, including large increases in chlamydia, gonorrhea and HIV cases, officials say.

By the 12th grade, 65 percent of high school students have had sexual intercourse, and one in five has had four or more partners, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Many of the diseases, known as STDs, can cause serious health problems, including pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, ectopic pregnancy and increased risk of HIV.

Johanna Nestor, director of the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs at DHHS, said President George W. Bush initiated the “Parents Speak Up” campaign in his state-of-the-union speech in 2004, urging parents to talk to their children about waiting to have sex.

“The message is to get parents to talk to their children early and often about waiting to have sex,” Nestor said.

In recent decades, a national political and philosophical battle has raged over whether children should be told to wait to have sex until marriage, or instructed to use condoms to prevent STDs. Republicans have long called for abstinence education, primarily based on moral reasons.

In recent years, more government funds have been dedicated to abstinence education. But for every $9 spent on sex education, only $1 is spent on abstinence education, said Moira Gaul, director of Womens’ Reproductive Health at the Family Research Council, a pro-family public policy organization in Washington, D.C.
Pro-Abstinence Rally Held In Downtown

October 17, 2007

Hoping to stem an increase in sexually transmitted diseases among teens and young adults, Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke took part in a pro-abstinence rally in downtown Los Angeles on Wednesday to urge youths to abstain from sex.

Highlighting a recently released study showing that teens between the ages of 15 and 19 have a higher rate of STDs than any other age group, Burke called the problem an epidemic.

“We just can’t be silent about what we’re seeing,” she said. “We have to encourage parents to talk to their children and tell them they face tremendous risks if involved with sex. ... (There’s) nothing wrong today to say to young people to stay away (from sex).”

The morning rally outside the county Hall of Administration was intended to promote local participation in the national “Parents Speak Up” campaign, designed to encourage parents to initiate conversations with their children about abstinence.

Burke teamed up with actress and AIDS activist Sheryl Lee Ralph, platinum-selling gospel duo Mary Mary, comedian Michael Colyer and community groups La Familia Hispana and Sex, Love & Choices, which promote abstinence among Hispanic and black youth.

“We are not talking about it properly and in a way that is reaching our children because they are infected,” Ralph said at the rally.

A recent study by the Public Health Institute Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development concluded that the number of new STDs among California youth is greater than previously thought.

According to the study:
• half of all new HIV cases are black females 15 years of age or older;
• people between the ages of 15 and 19 have the highest rate of STDs among any other group;
• Hispanic teen pregnancy is 68 percent higher than the rate among non-Hispanic teens;
• two out of three teenage parents do not graduate.

Although abstinence was the message being promoted at the rally, James Bolden, press deputy for Burke, made it clear that abstinence was only part of the supervisor’s message.

“She believes in abstinence ... but if you’re going to have sex you better have protection,” he said.

Miriam Gerace, director of communications for Planned Parenthood of Los Angeles, agreed that it’s important to talk about abstinence as long as it is followed by information on safe sex.

“We approve of any effort that begins with abstinence and goes from there. But if you begin and end with abstinence you are putting young people’s life in danger,” she said.
How does Planned Parenthood explain this? Rate of sexually-transmitted diseases soars among young Californians

October 17, 2007

A study published last month in the Californian Journal of Health Promotion reports that in 2005 there were 1.1 million new cases of sexually-transmitted infections among young people in California.

The 1.1 million figure is ten times higher than previously believed, and it means that in the 15-24 age group, diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, HPV and HIV now infect almost one out of every four young Californians.

Is this because of a lack of sex-ed in the public schools? Apparently not. According to Chris Weinkopf, editorial-page editor of the Los Angeles Daily News, the California Department of Education reports that “96 percent of California school districts provide comprehensive sexual health education” and all California schools have been required to teach HIV/AIDS prevention education since 1992.

Can we blame the abstinence-only programs promoted by the Bush administration? Not in California. Weinkopf notes that state law prohibits ‘abstinence-only’ education in the public schools. In addition, California may be the only state in the country that has refused to accept millions of federal dollars for abstinence education.

“This [soaring rate of sexually-transmitted infections] is no surprise,” said Linda Klepacki, sexual health analyst for Focus on the Family Action in an online press release. “California has insisted on teaching contraceptive-based sex education in their schools all along. They expect teens to be sexually active. They don’t raise the health standard to abstinence… It’s clear California supports sexually active teens, and STI rates will naturally explode with these policies.”

Another factor in the out-of-control disease rates among California children and young adults may be the introduction of the “morning-after” pill. According to testimony offered to the FDA in 2004, sexually-transmitted infections soared in the British Isles when “Plan B” (the morning-after pill) was made available without prescription in 2000. Ignoring the warning signals from the UK, California subsequently became one of the first states to permit the sale of Plan B over-the-counter without an age limit. (Compiled testimony of Wendy Wright, Carole Denner, and Jill Stanek, “The Morning-After Pill: An Ill Wind This Way Blows.”)

The new study on sexually-transmitted infections among young people in California was completed by the Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development at the Public Health Institute in Oakland. Study author Dr. Petra Jerman told Medical News Today that the statistics revealed an epidemic of which, like an iceberg, only a small part is visible.

The authors acknowledged that their figures are underestimated because of incomplete screening of sexually active young people, and failure to confirm the effectiveness of treatment through follow-up testing.

Ed Thomas of OneNewsNow.com added another dimension to this distressing picture by reporting that a striking increase in suicide rates among people ages 10 to 24 has been confirmed by recently released statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

At the same time, says Thomas, UCLA psychiatrist Dr. Miriam Grossman is convinced that promiscuity is the root cause of much depression. Dr. Grossman argues that the promiscuity-depression-suicide link is being ignored by doctors who fail to caution students against the documented self-destructive dangers rampant in the university’s sexual “hook-up” culture.
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

We’re failing to educate teenagers about STDs

October 19, 2007

ANEW study from California’s Public Health Institute gave us some very disturbing news concerning sexually transmitted diseases among the state’s teenagers and young adults. According to the report, each year people in California ages 15 to 24 suffer more than 1.1 million new STD cases, a staggering figure.

With that, the burden on our medical industry is enormous. The report estimates that those infections add up to more than $1 billion in lifetime medical costs. It’s obvious we have dropped the ball on education among our youth, and now the ramifications of our failure to educate is coming full cycle.

The California Journal of Health Promotion said the study focused on eight major STDs, and used mathematical models to calculate the incidence of the infections among the 15-24 age group county-by-county. The numbers from 2005 show 62,417 new STD cases in Alameda County, 28,519 in Contra Costa, 15,440 in Solano, and 8,642 in San Mateo.

If you think these figures are alarming, consider this — not all STD cases are reported. For instance, human papillomavirus, or HPV, is not subject to mandatory reporting although it’s easy to transmit and can lead to cervical cancer.

In fact, there seems to be confusion among physicians on what must be reported, and what is private, according to Francie Wise, communicable disease program chief for Contra Costa Public Health. In addition, Wise said, “patients say — Please don’t report it.”

This is a collapse of communication. Not enough is being communicated to young teens as the danger of catching STDs, and how common these diseases have become. Physicians must have clear-cut understanding on what should be reported. We fear the numbers in this study are far short of what’s really out there.

It boils down to sex education. Pushing abstinence-only behavior is nothing more than a pipe-dream. Our youth are having sex, unfortunately unprotected sex. How about instead of spending billions to treat STDs, we invest millions into preventing them. We must come up with innovative programs at the local, state and national levels, and education tools that youths will listen to and honestly take to heart, not boring videos in some classroom or silly scare tactics.

The numbers indicate we need to take a realistic look at an epidemic among our youth right under our noses. We need to stop the spread of STDs now.
The hidden STD epidemic among California youth

The Fresno Bee

Most STD cases unreported, study says
Documented illnesses in state just tip of the iceberg

October 21, 2007
By Farin Montañez

About a million sexually transmitted disease cases in teens and young adults in California went unreported in 2005, according to a study released this month.

“This epidemic is like an iceberg -- what you see is just a small part of what you have,” said Petra Jerman, the study’s lead researcher.

Out of an estimated 1.1 million new cases of eight major STDs in Californians ages 15 to 24, fewer than 102,000 were reported, according to a study from the nonprofit Public Health Institute’s Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development in Oakland.

Even the researchers were surprised at the huge difference between estimated cases and the number reported.

“We expected higher numbers than what is reported, because we know from other studies that they are under-reported,” Jerman said. “But 10 times the reported number seems high even to us.”

Numbers also were high for Fresno County.

Among about 158,000 teenagers and young adults in the county, there may have been 45,768 cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B, genital herpes, HPV and trichomoniasis in 2005, the study estimates. One person can report more than one STD case, Jerman said.

It is estimated that there are two to five times more cases of STDs out there than are actually reported, county health department officials said.

And high rates of sexually transmitted diseases are costing patients and health-care providers a lot of money -- up to $29 million in Fresno County alone for lifetime treatment for the estimated number of cases in 2005. Costs rise when patients have a STD for a long time without getting screened or treated for it, said Shahla Rahmani, an epidemiologist for Fresno County.

The study group used national estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to determine the prevalence of STDs in California, Jerman said. Total costs for lifetime treatment of new STD cases were calculated using national cost-per-case averages.

HIV -- the deadliest of the eight major STDs -- was the second most under-reported disease in the study after hepatitis B. The study estimates that there were 29,000 new HIV cases in California in 2005 -- nearly six times the number of reported cases.

Observers say there are several reasons why STDs are under-reported: People are afraid to get tested or just assume they aren’t infected; it is not mandatory to report some STDs to the state; and some counties have limited funding to run STD awareness campaigns.

“They’re scared to get tested,” said Renae Bennett, 17, of Fresno. “I would be, too. I mean, that’s scary stuff.”

Paul Mortanian, an 18-year-old student at Fresno City College, agrees.

“They are stubborn, and they don’t want to believe they have it,’’ he said.

Teens also may be nervous about confidentiality, said Justin Dawson, a 19-year-old Fresno City College student. “They think their parents might find out, so they get uncomfortable about that and don’t get tested,’’ he said.
Planned Parenthood facilities offer confidential free or low-cost tests for sexually transmitted diseases, and the Fresno County Department of Community Health in downtown Fresno offers low-cost confidential and even anonymous STD testing.

Health officials say a lot of people don’t go in for testing because they show no symptoms and think they are healthy. “A lot of STDs, like chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis, are not symptomatic,” Rahmani said.

But the huge gap between estimated cases and the number of cases reported may be a result of nonmandatory reporting for certain diseases, Jerman said.

The three most common sexually transmitted diseases -- HPV, trichomoniasis and genital herpes -- are not tracked and reported to the state, for the simple fact that they are so common, Rahmani said.

And funding for awareness and prevention programs is an ongoing concern.

“We only get a little over $39,000 a year for our STD Community Intervention Program to cover all of Fresno County,” said Stephanie Garcia, a communicable disease specialist with the county’s health department. “So we have to target the providers that work with youth. We can’t reach out to the youth themselves.”

Some youths say more advertising would get more people motivated to get tested.

“I don’t see any on TV anymore,” Bennett said. “It’s like they’re not putting it out there.”

Dawson said he also has noticed a decline of STD awareness commercials on network television. “But I see a lot of commercials on VH1 and MTV,” he said.

But even current ads just aren’t getting the point across, Mortanian said.

“They preach on using condoms,” he said, “but they don’t preach on getting tested.”

Also published:

Most STD cases unreported, study says
Oct. 22

Most STD cases unreported, study says
Oct. 22