

Jackson County Department of Public Health

Melissa McKnight
Deputy Health Director
828-587-8288

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YOUNG PEOPLE HARD-HIT BY STDs: KNOW THE FACTS, GET YOURSELF TESTED

Three common STDs—chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis—are surging across the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Young people are especially hard-hit. In fact, because reported cases only account for a fraction of the national burden, CDC estimates 15-24 year olds account for half of all newly sexually transmitted infections each year. Jackson County is no exception. In 2018 alone, there were 222 reported cases of chlamydia, 74 reported cases of gonorrhea, and 7 reported cases of syphilis. The total numbers of chlamydia and gonorrhea cases are useful indicators of adolescent sexual health as they are most common among people ages 15-24 years.

“The consequences of STDs can be severe,” said Debbie Matthews, Communicable Disease Program Manager. “Because chlamydia and gonorrhea often have no symptoms, many infections go undiagnosed and this can lead to lifelong repercussions for a women’s reproductive health, including pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.”

Untreated STDs can also increase a person’s risk of getting HIV or passing it to a partner if they are living with HIV. Early detection through testing is key to avoiding these consequences, yet research has shown that many adolescents don’t talk with their providers about sexual health issues at all during annual visits.

To address these concerns, the Jackson County Department of Public Health (JCDPH) supports the campaign, Get Yourself Tested (GYT). GYT helps young people understand that STD testing is quick, simple, and usually painless. It also underscores the importance of having open and honest conversations with their healthcare provider about their sexual history to ensure they get the right STD tests and other critical information about prevention.

Getting tested for STDs both before having sex with a new partner and then regularly thereafter is one of the most important things a person can do to protect their health, but it’s not the only thing. There are several ways to prevent STDs. The most reliable way is to not have sex (vaginal, oral, or anal) but there are many other tried-and-true options such as talking openly with partners and healthcare providers about STDs, using condoms/dental dams the right way from start to finish, and reducing the number of sexual partners. Those who test positive for an STD should get treated right away—and be sure that their partner is also treated to lower the risk of getting infected again.

For more information about free STD testing and treatment, contact JCDPH at 828-587-8289 or visit <http://health.jacksonnc.org/sexual-health>.

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