

## Jackson County Department of Public Health

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### JCDPH HIGHLIGHTS HEALTH IMPACTS OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES DURING STI AWARENESS MONTH

Nearly 20 million new sexually transmitted infections (STIs) occur in the United States every year, costing the American healthcare system nearly \$16 billion in direct medical costs, says a 2013 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics indicates that, in Jackson County, the chlamydia and gonorrhea rates are greater than those of Western North Carolina—267 and 34.3 per 100,000 as compared to 198.9 and 31.9 per 100,000 respectively.

America's youth shoulder a substantial burden of these infections. The CDC estimates that half of all new STIs in the country occur among young men and women aged 15-24. The eight most common STIs include chlamydia, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, herpes simplex virus 2, HIV, HPV, syphilis, and trichomoniasis. The high incidence of STIs in the general population suggests that many Americans are at risk exposure to STIs, underscoring the need for prevention.

Despite this news, there are effective ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat STIs. STI screening and early diagnosis are essential in preventing transmission and the long term health consequences of STIs. The Jackson County Department of Public Health offers STI/HIV testing and counseling for county residents. Services are confidential and include a risk assessment, physical exam, and appropriate lab work.

Abstaining from sex, reducing the number of sexual partners, and consistently and correctly using condoms are additional ways to prevent STIs. Safe, effective vaccines are available to prevent hepatitis B and some types of HPV that cause disease and cancer. And, for all individuals who are sexually active—particularly young people—STI screening and prompt treatment (if needed) are a critical to protect a person's health and prevent transmission to others.

"We offer a variety of *confidential* teen health services at the Health Department," said Carla Morgan, Nursing Supervisor. "These services include family planning, emergency contraception, STI testing, and HIV testing. Parental permission is not required and most services are free of charge."

Join the Jackson County Department of Public Health as it promotes April as STI Awareness Month. Get tested for HIV or syphilis at any time, Monday-Friday from 8 AM- 5 PM. No appointments are necessary and patients do not have to see a nurse. Testing for other STIs is available as well. Learn more by calling 828-586-8994.

If you have any comments or concerns regarding STIs as a public health issue, please visit Jackson County Health Department's website at <http://health.jacksonnc.org/community-input> to give feedback or attend a Board of Health meeting. Meeting schedules can be found at <http://health.jacksonnc.org/board-of-health/>.

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Providers Debbie Hage, RN; Mary Puckett, PA; Lisa Shearer, FNP; and Lewis Beck, FNP are available to provide STI testing and information for anyone interested.

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