

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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HIV and STD Connection Makes Testing for Both Important December 1 is 17th Annual World AIDS Day

The connection between HIV infection and the presence of other sexually transmitted diseases is likely an overlooked area of HIV prevention, according to a Wyoming Department of Health representative.

Rob Johnston, HIV Prevention Program manager with the Wyoming Department of Health, said evidence indicates persons who have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) are far more likely to get HIV if exposed to the virus through sexual contact. “STDs weaken the immune system and sometimes cause sores that can serve as entry points for HIV,” Johnston said.

In 2010, Wyoming had 23 newly reported HIV cases.

Unfortunately, Johnston said, STDs such as gonorrhea are getting harder to treat. “Normally when someone gets gonorrhea, they can visit a healthcare provider for treatment with antibiotics. However, we are finding that gonorrhea doesn’t respond as well to treatment as before due to increasing antibiotic resistance,” he explained.

“Knowing about the link between STDs and HIV makes condom use and testing among sexually active individuals more important,” Johnston said. Condoms effectively prevent STD and HIV transmission. “The most common symptom of STDs and HIV is no symptom, which is why folks should get tested regularly for both and, if infected, seek care and treatment.”

Johnston encouraged residents to talk with a medical professional about their sexual behavior and testing. “Sexually active individuals should get tested for HIV and STDs annually or when they have a new partner,” Johnston said. “Without testing folks for both, we may miss STDs that can help lead to HIV transmission.”

Johnston also mentioned the possibility that HIV medications are not as effective in controlling HIV in patients who also have STDs. “Treating HIV-positive patients may also mean taking care of other STDs,” he said.

Wyoming residents are encouraged to visit www.knowyo.org for a free STD and HIV screening voucher. Participating sites are identified on an interactive web site map, as well as educational information.

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