

ALASKA: Rural Youths Can Tap Web for STD Info

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A new Web site, iknowmine.org, targets high rates of STDs among Alaska's youth. The site's name refers to a person's STD and HIV status, which public health officials say is positive for too many Alaskans, including a growing number of native Alaskans.

According to the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, which created the site, native Alaskan women in 2008 reported chlamydia at a rate about 10 times higher than the US population. For every year since 2000, Alaska's chlamydia rate has ranked first or second nationally. In southwest Alaska, the rate of gonorrhea tripled between 2007 and 2008, according to state reports.

The site offers a portal for ordering up to 20 free condoms. Beginning in January, site visitors will be able to order kits allowing them to collect specimens in private and mail in the swabs for chlamydia and gonorrhea testing. The testing program is offered through a partnership with Johns Hopkins University.

The online presence is particularly important for rural youths, who may find it difficult or embarrassing to access information and services related to STDs in their communities.

The design of the site is the product of discussions with rural young people, said public health officials. The officials acknowledged that promotion of condom use is controversial, but they said community leaders did not rule it out.

"Not one said we shouldn't talk about things other than abstinence," said Jessica Leston, STD program coordinator for the consortium, though the site promotes abstinence as the best prevention method.

To access the Web site, visit www.iknowmine.org.