

UTAH: "Teen STD Rate Soars on Salt Lake City's West Side"
Salt Lake Tribune (01.06.11):: Heather May

In west Salt Lake City, the chlamydia rate among youths far exceeds the national average. Glendale and Rose Park have the highest rates of chlamydia diagnoses, and the highest birth rates, among Utah teens. Glendale's STD rate is 32 times higher than Provo's, the lowest in the state, Department of Health data show.

"We have such a problem out here on the west side," said Amanda Thorderson, a Rose Park mother and member of the Salt Lake City school board. "Every parent should know what the rate of infection is in Salt Lake City and how that infection is growing every year. Parents have no idea."

Where rates of poverty, violence, and substance abuse are higher than average, teens are more likely to have sex at an early age, according to a 2007 review of 400 US studies on teen sexual activity. Some of the most ethnically diverse Salt Lake City ZIP codes have the highest rates of chlamydia.

Most Utah chlamydia diagnoses are made among whites. Nonetheless, the infection rate among Latinos is three times the rate among whites, and black residents have five times the infection rate of whites.

Heather Bush, an STD prevention specialist for the state Department of Health, said she feels most at ease providing instruction to youths in detention, as public schools are virtually off-limits. The correctional centers' population is disproportionately minority, and Bush also can reach west side youths there.

While her message is abstinence-based, Bush lets the kids know that having fewer sex partners and using protection also are smart choices. "I'm trying to empower them to make their own decisions," she said.