

UNITED STATES: "What About the Boys? Chlamydia Tests for Teens Often Miss Key Factor"
Washington Times (02.22.10):: Cheryl Wetzstein

Chlamydia is the most common bacterial STD in the United States - 1.2 million cases were documented in 2008 - and young people particularly are at risk. Results from a recent study indicate that testing and treatment efforts targeting only females are not adequate to reduce incidence of the disease.

"If our goal is to reduce the prevalence of chlamydia in our young people, we're going to have to pay attention to finding and treating [their] partners," said Dr. Byron Batteiger, a professor at Indiana University's School of Medicine and lead author of the study.

From 1999 to 2009, Batteiger and colleagues followed nearly 400 urban teenage girls for an average of three years. Every three months, participants met with health care professionals and underwent chlamydia testing. Any infection was treated promptly. The girls also kept six-month diaries so they could discuss sexual activity, boyfriends, and condom use with providers.

Given this optimal situation - highly motivated, informed girls under the regular care of providers - the chlamydia infection rate should have declined significantly. Instead, it stayed level, ranging from 10.4 percent to 10.9 percent at key points during the study.

The reason for the persistently high rates was re-infection, said the researchers. Sixty-one girls acquired chlamydia a second time, and 60 were re-infected three to nine times.

According to Batteiger, 313 male sex partners of the participants were brought in for testing. Of these young men, roughly 26 percent were found to have chlamydia, "a very high level of infection in this pool," he said. The girls with chlamydia infections named a total of 1,387 male partners, so the boyfriends who were tested represented less than a quarter of potentially infected partners.

Thus, "Frequent testing and treatment of women alone will not suffice" in reducing chlamydia in high-risk populations, the team concluded. Aggressive screening and treatment must also target young men, they said.

The study, "Repeated Chlamydia trachomatis Genital Infections in Adolescent Women," was published in the Journal of Infectious Diseases (2010;201:42-51).