



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **Health Department Reports Significant Increase in Syphilis Cases**

**PITTSBURGH** – The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) today reported a significant increase in syphilis this year in Allegheny County, with 98 cases reported as November 10, compared to 56 at the same time in 2013, representing a 75% increase in early syphilis (primary, secondary and early latent).

Ninety percent of the syphilis infections have occurred among men, the majority of whom are men who have sex with other men (MSM). Among the men with syphilis, 39% were HIV-positive.

“There has been a resurgence of syphilis in the United States since 2011, with increases noted particularly among MSM. While infections nationwide and in Allegheny County are primarily occurring among MSM, anyone engaging in risky sexual behavior is at risk,” said Health Director Dr. Karen Hacker.

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*, which is passed from person to person through direct contact during vaginal, anal or oral sex. In the early phases, infected persons may experience a sore on their genitalia or in the mouth or a rash, often on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Syphilis can also be associated with very mild symptoms or none at all.

Syphilis is treatable and curable with antibiotics, and early diagnosis and treatment can prevent complications. Untreated, it can lead to long-term health complications. Syphilis may increase a person's chance of acquiring HIV. In pregnant women, syphilis can cause stillbirths, neonatal deaths and congenital malformations.

To reduce the risk of syphilis, the Health Department is urging all sexually active men and women to follow safer sexual practices – reduce the number of sex partners, use latex condoms, and have a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has negative test results for STDs.

Avoiding risky sexual behavior will reduce one's risk of becoming infected with syphilis and other STDs such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, and HIV. Individuals who are at risk – those having multiple sexual partners, anonymous sexual activity, and MSM – should be screened for syphilis, HIV and other STDs.

Free screening and treatment for syphilis and other STDs are available at the Health Department's STD Clinic at 3441 Forbes Avenue, Oakland. For more information, call the STD Program at **412-578-8081**.

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