

For Immediate Release

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Syphilis Outbreak Confirmed in Marion County

Marion County Health Department officials are confronting an outbreak of syphilis in Indianapolis. The outbreak is the result of 45 cases being reported since January 1. The threshold for an outbreak is nine new cases for two months. Marion County documented 16 cases in February and 21 cases in March.

In 2007, Marion County reported 38 cases for the entire year, with a monthly average of just over 3 cases per month.

The 2008 outbreak is centered on men, particularly men who have sex with men. Local health officials say 70 percent of the current cases are white males. So far this year, only two cases have involved women.

Health officials say risks for contracting syphilis include meeting partners at bars and clubs and finding partners through the Internet. Those individuals engaging in these and other risky behaviors are encouraged to get tested.

A related concern is that health officials also acknowledge that among those testing positive for syphilis this year, 70 percent have also tested positive for HIV.

In response to the outbreak, the Marion County Health Department has mobilized a rapid response team that is implementing a previously developed plan that includes guidance on testing, laboratory analysis, reporting of results, treatment and appropriate follow-up.

Local health officials report that few of the cases have been connected to one another. It is likely there are many cases that have not yet been diagnosed.

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In 1999, Indianapolis had the highest incidence of new syphilis cases among large U.S. cities. Marion County reported 526 cases of syphilis, leading to federal funding and creation of the Stamp Out Syphilis (SOS) coalition. The coalition of community partners worked to reduce the number of syphilis cases in Marion County. Through this intensive, coordinated community effort, the outbreak was contained, and Indianapolis achieved the lowest syphilis incidence among large U.S. cities in 2003, 2004 and 2005.

The SOS group, renamed Strength Opportunities and Successes, continues to support health initiatives in Indianapolis.

Information concerning the Syphilis outbreak can be found at the Marion County Health Department's Web site, www.mchd.com.