

## **Sex-partner antibiotics pilot program seems to be working STD reinfection rate drops 41%, city officials say**

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Baltimore City health officials say a pilot program that allows people with sexually transmitted diseases to distribute antibiotics to their sexual partners appears to be working.

Using three months of data, officials found that among patients with gonorrhea and chlamydia who visited two city health clinics and received extra antibiotics for their partners, the reinfection rate was 2.3 percent.

That compares to a historical three-month reinfection rate of 3.9 percent, making the decrease 41 percent. The theory is that patients are less likely to be reinfected if their partners have been treated.

This so-called Expedited Partner Therapy is slowly becoming the standard of care for patients with STDs as public health officials try to hold back the spread of such infections.

When a patient goes to a physician with an STD, the doctor suggests that his or her partner also be treated.

Under the new practice, the doctor at the participating clinic - the Druid or Eastern health clinic - can have the patient deliver antibiotics to up to three sexual partners.

(Most women, officials said, asked for medication for one partner, while most men requested pills for two partners).

"It takes away the hassle factor," said Dr. Emily Erbelding, director of STD clinical services for the Baltimore City Health Department. "It makes it easier for the partner to get treated."

At first, there were ethical and legal concerns about doctors dispensing prescription medication to people who are not their patients. But now, 15 states allow the practice and more might do so soon, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Maryland is not one of those states, but in 2007, the governor signed a bill allowing Baltimore to run its pilot program.

While the three-month reinfection rate might seem low, Erbeding said that historically the city's reinfection rate over six to 12 months is more like 15 percent.

"We hope to find even greater improvement as we continue to do this over time," she said.

Gonorrhea and chlamydia rates in Baltimore are much higher than in the nation as a whole, she said.