

AIDS Foundation

OF CHICAGO

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Public Health Advocates: Stem Spread of STDs in Illinois with Expedited Partner Therapy Coalition Supports Bill Modeled On Laws in 15 Other States

CHICAGO – Cook County has the highest number of gonorrhea cases and the second highest number of chlamydia cases of any county in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That’s one reason a coalition of supporters from 26 Illinois medical, public health, and nonprofit organizations are pushing to pass legislation that would permit expedited partner therapy (EPT) – a practice that would allow doctors to treat partners of individuals diagnosed with chlamydia or gonorrhea without requiring a physical examination.

The legislation (Senate Bill 212) sponsored by Senator David Koehler (D-Peoria) is modeled on laws in 15 other states, including Arizona, Iowa, Louisiana, and Mississippi and would allow medical professionals to provide antibiotics or prescriptions to the partners of patients newly diagnosed with gonorrhea or chlamydia. EPT is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Medical Association.

Senate Bill 212 is currently set to be called for a vote in the Illinois Senate the week of March 23.

“STD rates in Peoria are twice the statewide rate,” said Sen. Koehler. “They aren’t just a Chicago problem. That’s why I decided to sponsor this bill. Illinois health care providers need new tools to fight STDs, and EPT represents the state-of-the art.”

EPT is safe, affordable and effective. Single doses of common antibiotics treat gonorrhea and chlamydia. The most common side effect is mild gastrointestinal intolerance. Further, no problems with antibiotics prescribed through EPT have been reported in California since the program began in 2001. In studies funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, EPT cut STD re-infection rates between 20 and 46 percent compared to traditional partner referral methods.

“EPT gives health practitioners an effective tool to treat the sexual partners of patients with STDs which would break the cycle of disease transmission,” says Dr. Will Wong, Medical Director at the Chicago Department of Public Health's Division of STI/HIV/AIDS.

Half of the sexual partners of patients with STDs do not get treatment for their infection (often because they have no symptoms) and are likely to re-infect the patient or infect other partners. EPT is permitted

only if the health care provider believes the partner is unable or unlikely to seek an in-person exam and treatment.

STDs can cause severe health problems for women. When detected early, treatment is simple and consists of a single dose of antibiotics. Dr. Rashmi Chugh, Medical Officer from the DuPage County Department of Public Health states that "women are disproportionately impacted, since up to 40% of women with untreated chlamydia infections develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can lead to long-term consequences such as infertility, ectopic pregnancy, and chronic pelvic pain."

Along with medications or prescriptions, the provider would be required to counsel the patient and provide written materials with allergy warnings, medication directions, information on treatment and prevention of STDs, and the need for a follow-up medical exam including testing for HIV and other STDs. "This could help to not only break the cycle of reinfection in the patient, but prevent further disease transmission and complications due to chlamydia and gonorrhea infections," says Dr. Chugh.

In Illinois in 2007, more than 55,000 chlamydia cases and over 20,000 gonorrhea cases were reported. Chlamydia cases increased 90 percent from 1997 to 2007. Chlamydia rates in the city of Chicago, and Pope, Peoria, and St. Clair Counties are double statewide rates. Antibiotics for chlamydia treatment can cost under \$2.50 per patient, while PID treatment can cost more than \$1,000 per patient.

Through a pilot EPT program in Baltimore, officials found that patients with gonorrhea and chlamydia who visited two city health clinics and received extra antibiotics for their partners, the re-infection rate was 2.3 percent. That compares to a historical three-month re-infection rate of 3.9 percent – a 41 percent decrease.

Founded in 1985 by community activists and physicians, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago is a catalyst for local, national, and international action on HIV/AIDS.

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