

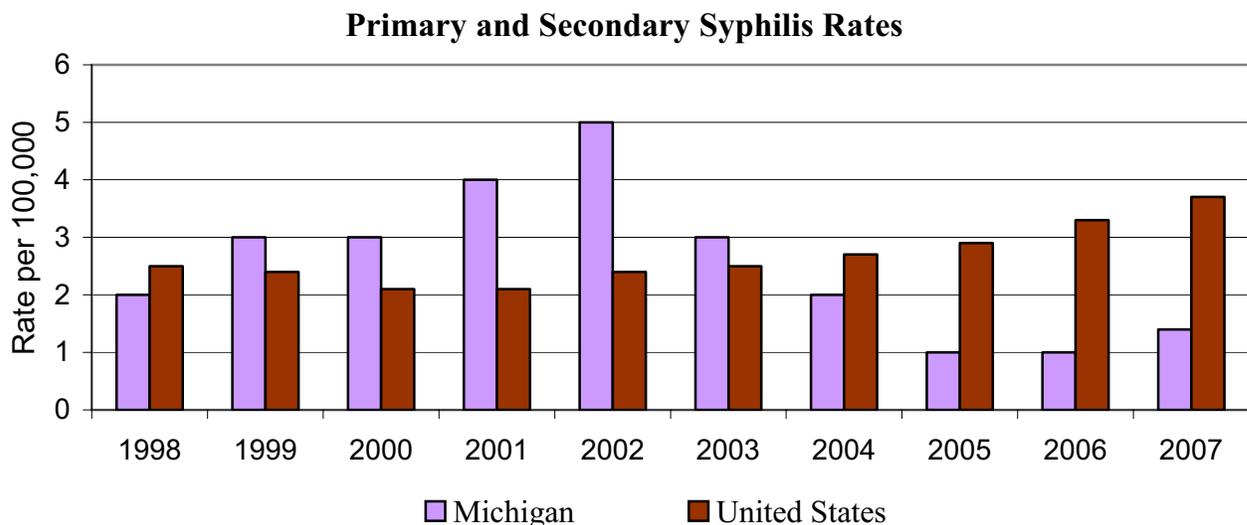


## Topic: Sexually Transmitted Disease

### 36. Syphilis

Primary and secondary (P&S) or infectious syphilis is a bacterial infection predominately spread through sexual contact. It can also be spread from mother to child. Syphilis is relatively difficult to transmit. The social networks at risk for syphilis in Michigan vary by geography and include individuals who use crack, cocaine, or heroin, exchange money or drugs for sex, or who are men who have sex with men. People are infectious for a short period of time, and the incubation period is long, providing opportunity for treatment and prevention. P&S syphilis can be successfully treated with antibiotics.

#### *How are we doing?*



The total number of reported primary and secondary syphilis cases in Michigan in 2007 has increased slightly to 137 (nearly 10%), compared to 2006, following a significant downward trend that started in the latter half of 2002.

After years of steady increases, Detroit reported 69 P&S syphilis cases in 2007, an 86% decrease compared to 2002. Numbers of infectious syphilis cases in outstate Michigan have stayed at low levels, with 68 cases reported in 2007. Michigan's goal is to maintain these historically low levels.

#### *How Does Michigan compare with the U.S.?*

The rate of primary and secondary syphilis cases in Michigan was 1 per 100,000 population in 2007, which was lower than the national rate of 3.7 per 100,000 population.

#### *How are different populations affected?*

The rates of primary and secondary syphilis are more evenly distributed among different age groups than gonorrhea and chlamydia, which primarily affect younger age groups. In 2007, the rates of infectious syphilis were higher among men, reflecting increased transmission in men who have sex with men. Blacks account for nearly 60% of the syphilis cases; however, there have been increases among White men in the past several years. Given that sexual activity does not vary by race, the increased rate is evidence that once a pathogen is in a community or social network, the likelihood of acquiring that



## Critical Health Indicators

infection increases significantly. The highest numbers of reported cases of infectious syphilis, in 2007, were in the City of Detroit and Wayne, Genesee, Washtenaw, Kent, and Oakland Counties.

### ***What is the Department of Community Health doing to improve this indicator?***

As part of the National Syphilis Elimination Campaign, collaboration between the City of Detroit, the State of Michigan and local community-based organizations (CBOs) resulted in a model program that targets interventions to individuals most at risk.

The MDCH has developed many tools to assist CBOs. The most helpful partnerships are with CBOs that can reach high-risk communities. The Department collaborates with Partner Counseling and Referral Services (PCRS) staff in providing integrated HIV and syphilis prevention services targeting men who have sex with men (MSM) in Detroit and Oakland County.

Partnerships with various programs have been successful in providing onsite services to high-risk populations. MDCH collaborations have brought STD education and care services to populations who rarely seek medical services and, more importantly, may not otherwise have had access to health care. The rapport between the MDCH and these CBOs has reduced the stigma often attached to syphilis interventions and provided opportunities for high risk populations to access services.

The MDCH has worked in partnership with the Genesee County Health Department (GCHD) to address a syphilis outbreak in their area in 2008. The MDCH has attended regular meetings of the GCHD's internal disease response team to provide technical assistance. Disease Intervention Specialists from other counties have been assigned on a routine basis to assist in interview and investigative duties. Additionally, outreach specialists have been made available to draw blood at nontraditional screening events.