



Comanche County Health Department

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## **Syphilis Outbreak in Comanche County**

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and Comanche County Health Department announced today that they have identified an outbreak of syphilis in Lawton and the surrounding areas. Health officials are alarmed because syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) which can have significant health outcomes if undiagnosed and untreated. Officials are also concerned that the outbreak may spread to counties beyond the outbreak area.

“The good news is syphilis can be identified by examination and testing, cured with antibiotics, and through disease investigation, the spread of syphilis can be stopped,” said Comanche County Health Department Regional Director Brandie O'Connor. “We want to encourage people to seek testing and treatment if they have been having unprotected sex. Free confidential testing and treatment are available at local county health departments.”

“The people at high risk for Syphilis due to this specific outbreak include men who have sex with men, people who have multiple sex partners, IV drug users and people who have sex with anonymous partners, including those met online.”

Syphilis is a curable bacterial infection that is primarily spread through sexual contact.

A person can contract and spread syphilis through:

- Oral sex;
- Anal sex;
- Vaginal sex, or
- Through other intimate contact including kissing (when a syphilis sore is present in the mouth).

Symptoms of syphilis include:

- A painless lesion, called a chancre, during the early stages of the disease,
  - Can be on or in the penis, or inside the vagina, anus or mouth;
- Rashes
  - Appear rough, red or reddish brown spots on palms of hands and bottoms of feet or on the torso;
- Swollen lymph glands;
- Sore throat; and
- Fatigue.

Left untreated, syphilis can cause damage to:

- Major organs, including the brain and blood vessels; and
- Cause serious birth defects or infant death



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Early detection and treatment prevent further damage that syphilis may cause to the body, and may also reduce the risk for HIV transmission.

From 2013 to 2014, there has been a 300 percent increase in reported syphilis cases in Comanche County.

“There are many ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat syphilis and other STDs. Limiting sex partners and consistent condom use will greatly reduce one’s risk of becoming infected with STDs including syphilis. Once infected, STD screening and early diagnoses are vital to prevent serious health problems and increased transmission, or spreading of syphilis. Screening is particularly important since many STDs often have no signs or symptoms,” O’Connor emphasized.

For information about prevention, risk factors, testing and treatment please call the Comanche County Health Department at (580) 248-5890.

For more information about syphilis and other STDs, visit these Web sites: <http://hivstd.health.ok.gov> and click on “Handouts/Fact Sheets” on the left side of the page, or [www.cdc.gov/std](http://www.cdc.gov/std) and click on the STD you want information at the top of the page.

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