



## NEWS RELEASE

### Public Health

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## Community Task Force Forming to Fight Rising STD Rates

A countywide Community STD Task Force is being formed to combat an increase in sexually transmitted diseases in the county, including congenital syphilis, which can cause infants to be born prematurely or stillborn.

The San Bernardino County Department of Public Health is inviting community leaders and members, school representatives, provider offices, STD prevention groups, faith-based organizations, youth and other key stakeholders to work together on reducing the rate of STDs while raising awareness of these preventable diseases. The first meeting of the Task Force will be April 19 at San Bernardino Valley College.

“STDs are treatable when caught early, but more importantly they are preventable,” said Dr. Maxwell Ohikhuare, County Health Officer, “together the STD Task Force will work to raise awareness, and increase testing and treatment.”

The Department of Public Health has reported the highest numbers of treatable sexually transmitted disease cases in the county’s history. According to the recently released County Health Rankings, San Bernardino County ranked 46 out of 57 in overall health. In 2016, San Bernardino County reported more than 15,000 cases of sexually transmitted diseases with large increases in gonorrhea and syphilis. STDs have shown a steady increase, with the county ranking among the highest in numbers of STD cases in the U.S. The county ranks 16th among all counties in the nation for numbers of cases of chlamydia, and 25th in gonorrhea. While STDs are reported out of all adolescent and adult age groups, youth aged 15 to 24 years account for almost 60 percent of all new STDs reported in the county in 2016.

In 2016, the County reported 20 cases of congenital syphilis and four cases so far in 2017. In 2011, the county had no cases of congenital syphilis. Infants can be born prematurely or be stillborn when a pregnant woman is infected and is not tested and treated. Congenital syphilis is completely preventable.

Public Health encourages sexually active residents to “Get Tested.” April is STD Awareness month and is an opportunity to call attention to dramatic increases in STDs in this county.

There are ways for county residents to protect themselves from STD infections. Abstaining from sex is the most effective method. Consider limiting the number of people you have sex with and use latex condoms correctly and consistently. Be aware that alcohol and drugs may lower your tendency to use condoms. Get vaccinated for Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Many people with STD infections do not have symptoms, so it’s important to ask your doctor for a screening test at least yearly. Having an STD makes it easier to get HIV, so it’s important to ask for an HIV test also.

For information about low-cost or no-cost STD or HIV testing, call the Department of Public Health at 800-722-4777 or find a testing site at the [Get Tested](#) webpage. For more information or to register for the STD Task Force call 800-722-4794 and ask for a Health Educator.

