

Innovative Pilot Project Helps Reduce Chlamydia Rates Among Youth in Rural Florida County

Problem Overview:

According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, by the time Florida students are seniors in high school, 63% report having sexual intercourse at least once. In 2008, Florida's Madison County, a predominantly rural area with a population of about 20,000, had the 2nd highest rates of chlamydia in the state among youth aged 15–19 years. Black youth in Madison County are disproportionately affected by sexually transmitted disease (STD), and the majority (57%) of students in Madison's public schools are black.

Program/Activity Description:

To help reduce sexual risk behaviors and lower STD rates among Madison County adolescents, the University of South Florida (USF)/Florida Department of Education (FDOE)/HIV/AIDS Prevention Education Program (PEP), with the support of CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health, launched a pilot project in 2010. In spearheading this project, USF/FDOE PEP worked closely with many partner agencies that were instrumental in planning and implementing the pilot program: school health and social service agencies in the local community; the Madison County School District; the Healthy Start Coalition of Jefferson, Madison, and Taylor Counties; and the Madison County Health Department.

Key features of the pilot project included the following:

- Positive Action curriculum kits—distributed to every Madison County Public School, and implemented K-12 in the school district. Positive Action is designed to help create a healthy school climate for students and has been shown to reduce youth risk behaviors, including sexual risk behaviors.
- Funding and staff to implement Making Proud Choices, an evidence-based, comprehensive sexual health education curriculum, to youth in churches, a Boys and Girls Club, and a community center.
- Training of staff members of the local health department and the Healthy Start Coalition on how to use the Beyond the Birds and the Bees curriculum to teach parents to be the primary sexuality educators for their children and to advocate for science-based HIV, STD, and teen pregnancy prevention education in their district schools.
- Additional training for a Leadership Task Force to expand delivery of HIV/STD prevention education in community settings for parents and youth.



Program/Activity Results:

Madison County, which ranked 2nd highest for chlamydia rates among youth (aged 15–19 years) in Florida in 2008, dropped to 11th highest in 2010, and to 40th in 2012 among the 67 counties in the state—showing sustained improvement. The collaborative work of the USF/FDOE PEP Program and partners in Madison County contributed to this major accomplishment.

As recommended by the community partners, the county is considering use of Making Proud Choices with 9th-grade students in the classroom setting, in addition to using it in community venues. To more effectively address STD among its rural youth, Florida also plans to use the strategies and evaluation results from the Madison County pilot project to create an STD prevention guidance document applicable for statewide use.