

Screening Adolescents for STDs: Philadelphia's Innovative In-School Program

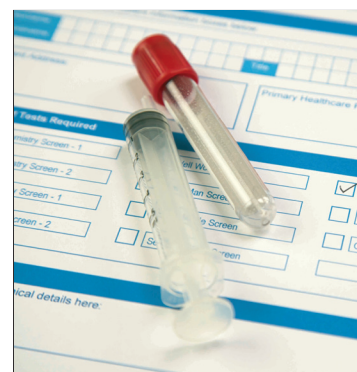
Problem Overview:

Many young people engage in sexual risk behaviors that can result in unintended health outcomes including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as chlamydia and gonorrhea, and HIV. Untreated chlamydia can have severe health consequences, particularly for young women (such as tubal pregnancy, infertility, and chronic pelvic pain). Sexually active teenagers also are among populations having the highest reported rates of gonorrhea infection. Many infections go undetected and untreated because people often do not have symptoms. Left untreated, these STDs can increase a person's risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV—the virus that causes AIDS. In 2001 in Philadelphia, the highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea cases reported (72% of the chlamydia cases and 54% of the gonorrhea cases) were among youth aged 15–24 years. Despite prevention efforts, incidence rates for these STDs have continued to rise among this age group.

Program/Activity Description:

Working together, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) and the School District of Philadelphia set up an in-school STD screening program to educate students about STDs, and identify and treat chlamydia and gonorrhea among high school students. Supported in part through the CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health, the School District of Philadelphia helps review educational materials used in the STD screening presentations, conducts educational workshops to raise awareness about the program, and facilitates use of the program by the schools.

Each high school notifies the students' parents about the program. Students attend a 25-minute educational program on common STDs and HIV, including risk factors and prevention methods. Confidential, urine-based testing is offered to all students who attend the presentation. Students who test positive are provided treatment.



Program/Activity Results:

For the 2002–2012 school years, the Philadelphia High School STD Screening Program performed 150,473 screening tests for chlamydia and gonorrhea on 103,625 students:

- 8,087 tests were positive (among 7,641 students).
- Of the students testing positive, 97% received treatment.
- 1,850 students who tested positive were rescreened within 3 months.
- 209 of 239 reinfected students (87%) were retreated.
- In addition, students who test positive for an STD are referred for HIV counseling and testing.

Since 2009, students in the program have been asked (via in-take information sheets completed by each student participating in the program) if they have ever had sex. Students infected with STD are asked additional risk behavior questions during in-school treatment or treatment at the health department clinic. This ongoing screening program continues to identify students likely at high risk for unhealthy outcomes from unprotected sex.

Data collected during student interviews are being used to better understand and address Philadelphia's STD problem among its youths. To reach students attending high schools in areas of higher incidence, the STD education and screening program is offered at least annually. Testing and treatment of STDs can be an effective tool in preventing the spread of HIV. Treatment of females with STDs is likely preventing pelvic inflammatory disease and other adverse conditions.