



**Contact:**  
Ken Johnson  
Media Relations Coordinator  
O: 405-425-4315  
Ken\_Johnson@occhd.org

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **April Is Sexual Health Awareness Month** *OCCHD continues free and confidential STD testing*

**Oklahoma City, Okla.** – [Oklahoma City-County Health Department](#) (OCCHD) reminds the public it’s offering free and confidential sexually transmitted disease (STD) screenings and treatment after it announced a syphilis outbreak in March, and in conjunction with April being Sexual Health Awareness Month.

“In recent weeks, we’ve made the community aware of an alarming spike in diagnosed syphilis cases linked to a certain social group displaying risky behaviors, such as frequent drug use, trading sex for money or drugs, or engaging in sex with multiple partners. If gone untreated, one could suffer severe consequences and irreparable damage to the brain, eyes and other vital organs,” said OCCHD’s Administrator of Clinical Services Tiffany Elmore.

Any person can be infected with syphilis by direct contact of a syphilis sore during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Sores can be found around the penis, vagina, anus or in the mouth. It can even spread from an infected mother to her unborn baby, which can lead to the loss of the pregnancy, low birth weight or death of the baby shortly after birth.

Go to your healthcare provider immediately if you think you have syphilis, even if signs/symptoms disappear. With the correct antibiotics, syphilis can be cured. Treatment may not undo any damage already caused by the infection.

Additionally, OCCHD encourages OK County residents to learn more about sexual health. Nearly 20 million new STDs cases are reported in the U.S. every year costing the American health system almost \$16 billion in direct medical costs alone. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates half of all new STDs occur among young men and women ages 15 to 24. OCCHD recommends sexually active people [talk, test, and treat](#).

Here are additional steps to follow to reduce the risk of spreading sexually transmitted diseases:

1. Being in a long-term monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and does not have syphilis.
2. If a sexual partner is infected or has recently undergone treatment, abstain from vaginal, anal or oral sex until a healthcare provider says the person is no longer contagious.
3. Use latex condoms every time you have sex.

*(more)*

4. Have an honest conversation with your healthcare provider and ask whether you should be tested for STIs. All pregnant women should be tested for syphilis at their first prenatal visit and again during their third trimester.

Elmore states, “Our experienced nurses and trained clinical staff who work under CDC guidelines and closely with OU Infectious Disease Physicians are ready to provide excellent care by making sure that the public is tested and treated for syphilis plus most types of sexually transmitted infections.”

OCCHD screens for Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, HIV, Syphilis and Trichomoniasis. Visit one of [OCCHD's three clinics](#), which are fully equipped for STI screening, from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m.-noon on Friday. OCCHD offers free and confidential, same-day STI appointments with limited same-day lab results identified through blood draws and swab tests.

### **About Oklahoma City-County Health Department**

Established in 1954, Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD) is committed to protecting health, promoting wellness and preventing disease to ensure a healthy future for the Oklahoma County-area community. OCCHD was one of the first public health departments in the nation to receive accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board. For more information, please visit [www.occhd.org](http://www.occhd.org).

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