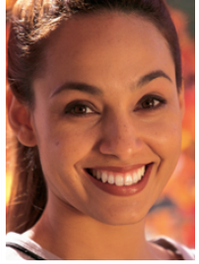


We've made great progress against this terrible disease, but there's much more work to be done. The time to act is NOW -- while syphilis rates remain relatively low. By detecting and treating syphilis early, we can make our communities healthier now and in the future. Educating congregants about preventing and treating diseases like syphilis is an important community health issue.

- Syphilis is preventable and treatable. Its spread can be stopped. Syphilis prevention methods (or strategies) can include abstinence, monogamy, i.e., being faithful to a single sex partner, or using condoms consistently and correctly. These approaches can avoid risk (abstinence) or effectively reduce risk for syphilis (monogamy, consistent and correct condom use). [NOTE: These messages may not all be appropriate for people of all faiths or religious backgrounds; only you, as a religious leader, can decide which messages can be effectively and appropriately delivered and which might be offensive or inappropriate for your congregation.]
- Syphilis can be passed from mother to baby, leading to health complications and even infant death.
- Syphilis progresses in stages and can lead to cardiovascular and neurological diseases and blindness over a period of time.
- Only a blood test and an exam by a health care provider can confirm whether someone has syphilis.
- Syphilis increases the chance of HIV transmission by 2-5 times.

SEE A BETTER FUTURE.

By working together through the Syphilis Elimination Effort (SEE) to eliminate syphilis NOW, we can:

- Reduce a glaring racial disparity in our nation's overall health
- Decrease the spread of HIV
- Improve infant health (by reducing the risk of mother-to-child transmission of syphilis)
- Strengthen our public health system, which is more important than ever for our nation's health and well-being
- Reduce health care costs

SEE YOURSELF IN ACTION.

For more information about SEE and how you can get involved, visit **www.cdc.gov/std/see/**.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

TOGETHER WE CAN SEE

SYPHILIS ELIMINATION EFFORT

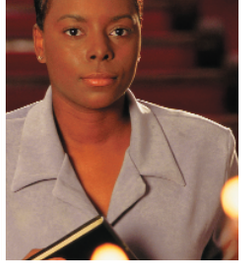
A community-based effort to eliminate syphilis in the United States.

INVOLVING THE FAITH COMMUNITY IN SYPHILIS ELIMINATION

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA

CDC

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION



LET'S SEE TOGETHER.

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease that is concentrated in a small number of counties in the United States – most of them urban or in the South. In 2003, 18 counties and one city accounted for half of reported syphilis cases in this country. Your community is one of these, and it is important to know that members of your congregation may be at risk.

Syphilis can affect anyone. Race or ethnicity is not a risk factor, but some communities are hit harder by the disease than others. Syphilis disproportionately affects African-American and Latino communities. It has been cited as one of the most glaring examples of existing gaps in minority health status. With increased awareness, appropriate diagnostic treatment, and changes in risk behaviors, this health disparity can be largely removed.

SEE WHAT'S POSSIBLE.

The faith community has had to take on many issues to help raise awareness and educate congregations about serious issues that disproportionately affect different populations.

Because of the tremendous respect and credibility the faith community generates, it has the ability to mobilize the masses and disseminate appropriate information. As the community's center for hope, religious life, and information, faith organizations can bring public health issues to light and move members to seek help if it is needed. There are many health issues facing congregants today: diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and sexually transmitted diseases. Each of these is a battle to be waged, and some can be won. Syphilis elimination is one battle that we can win today .

THE TIME TO SEE IS NOW.

U.S. syphilis rates reached their lowest levels ever in 2000 but have since been on the rise. Syphilis rates increased slightly in 2001 and more substantially in 2002. Between 2002 and 2003, the reported rate of primary and secondary (P&S) syphilis increased 4.6 percent. P&S syphilis rates among men rose 13.5 percent, while decreasing among women by 27.3 percent. Because syphilis tends to rebound in 7- to 10-year cycles, we must seize this opportunity to eliminate syphilis now, while rates are still relatively low.

The Syphilis Elimination Effort (SEE) is a national initiative bringing health care providers, policy makers, and religious and community leaders together to drive down syphilis rates in the United States. SEE is part of the National Plan to Eliminate Syphilis, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its federal, state, and local partners. The goals of the nationwide effort are to reduce the number of P&S syphilis cases to less than 1,000 (0.4 cases/100,000 people), and to make at least 90 percent of U.S. counties—including ours— syphilis-free.

African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately affected by syphilis. In 2003, the rate of P&S syphilis was 5.2 times greater among African Americans (7.8 cases/100,000 people) and two times greater among Hispanics (3 cases/100,000 people), than among whites (1.5 cases/100,000 people). In 2003, the rate of congenital syphilis (syphilis passed from mother to child) among African Americans was 33.9 cases/100,000 live births, compared to 1.3 cases/100,000 live births for white Americans. The rate of congenital syphilis was 14 times higher among Hispanic infants (18.1 cases/100,000 live births) compared to non-Hispanic whites (1.3 cases/100,000 live births). Getting rid of syphilis in the United States will be an important step in improving the overall health of our communities and the health of generations to come.

HOW CAN MY FAITH ORGANIZATION GET INVOLVED?

Your faith organization can play an important role in eliminating syphilis. You can educate your members about the disease and inspire them to have a healthier life and to protect future generations from putting themselves at risk for syphilis.

Here are some ways to help:

- Start a health ministry and raise awareness about all health issues affecting your members, including syphilis.
- Invite a community leader, policy maker, or a guest speaker involved with syphilis elimination to speak during a health ministry event.
- Get involved in a community coalition with other community leaders, health care providers, and policy makers to work on SEE.

There are numerous examples of religious leaders who have successfully reached their congregants with health promotion messages. One such example is the Balm in Gilead (http://www.balmingilead.org/about/welcome.asp). [PLEASE NOTE: Web sites to non-federal organizations are provided solely as a service to our users. The inclusion of these resources does not constitute an endorsement of these organizations or their programs by the CDC or the federal government, and none should be inferred. The CDC is not responsible for the content of the individual organization Web pages found at these links.]

In the face of a disease that is 100 percent preventable and treatable, faith organizations can provide important prevention education and help to those who may be affected. While we may have wished for years that it would just go away, we actually have a chance right now to make it so.