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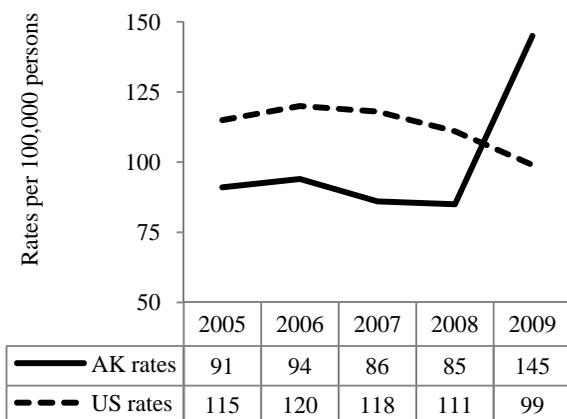
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Could Expedited Partner Therapy Work in Alaska? A Call for Health Care Provider and Patient Input

Background

Alaska is currently experiencing especially high rates of gonorrhea (GC) and chlamydia (CT) infection. In August 2009, the Section of Epidemiology (SOE) reported an increased incidence of GC infection in the Southwest region;¹ in March 2010, SOE reported that the GC infection rate had increased in almost every region statewide during 2009.² The 2009 rate of 145 cases per 100,000 persons was a 71% increase from the 2008 rate of 85 per 100,000 (Figure). Additionally, Alaska has had the first or second highest CT infection rate in the United States each year since 2000, and rates have increased nearly every year since 1996.

Figure. Gonorrhea Infection Rates — Alaska and the United States, 2005–2009*



*The 2009 US gonorrhea rate is based on preliminary data.

To combat the increasing rates of GC and CT infections, SOE is exploring opportunities for enhanced sexually transmitted disease (STD) prevention and control, including the use of expedited partner therapy (EPT). In collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), SOE is currently soliciting input from Alaska health care providers, patients, and other stakeholders in order to develop appropriate recommendations for the use of EPT in Alaska.

Expedited Partner Therapy

Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT) involves treating sex partners of STD-infected patients without prior medical evaluation or counseling, and several models of EPT are currently practiced in various regions of the United States (Box).³ A meta-analysis of EPT studies reported an overall 27% relative reduction in reinfection rates among patients randomized to receive EPT compared to patients referring partners to health care providers. Additionally, the EPT patients reported having equivalent or increased confidence that their partners had received treatment compared to patients using existing referral practices.⁴ Since 2005, the CDC has recommended that EPT be available to providers as an option for partner management of patients diagnosed with CT or GC. EPT represents an additional partner management tool to prevent and control STDs and does not replace other strategies such as provider-assisted partner referral, or Partner Services, when available.⁵

Box. Models of Expedited Partner Therapy

- Health care providers give patients medications or prescriptions for delivery to their partners
- Partners retrieve medications from cooperating pharmacies without needing an individual prescription
- Partners retrieve medications at public health clinics or other clinic venues
- Public health workers (e.g., disease intervention specialists) deliver medications to partners in non-clinical settings

Assessment of Future EPT Use in Alaska

CDC and SOE are gathering stakeholder information on EPT via anonymous surveys and in-person interviews. Two anonymous surveys—one for health care providers and one for patients—are currently available on-line. The health care provider survey focuses on providers' knowledge, attitudes, practices and perceived barriers regarding the use and models of EPT in Alaska. The patient survey focuses on patients' perspectives on EPT, STD treatment, and partner notification. Lastly, we are conducting semi-structured in-person or telephone interviews about STD treatment, partner notification, and EPT with selected stakeholders from two geographic areas in Alaska with high GC and CT infection rates. We will create recommendations for the future use of EPT in Alaska using the information collected from the surveys and interviews.

Because this evaluation is part of a public health response to the ongoing GC and CT epidemics in Alaska, the project was determined to be public health practice by both the CDC and Alaska Area institutional review boards.

Recommendations

1. We strongly encourage all health care providers who care for patients with STDs to complete the anonymous 15-minute provider survey, which is available at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/ProviderEPT
2. Health care providers should encourage patients who will be evaluated or who are at risk for STDs to complete the anonymous 10-minute patient survey, available at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/PatientEPT

References

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