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CONTACT:
Christina Anthony &
Matt Johnson, PIOs
pio@kalcouny.com

Health Officials, Concerned about STI Rates, Urge Testing, Treatment and Prevention During STI Awareness Month

KALAMAZOO, MI— The Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department is recognizing the month of April 2023 as Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Awareness Month. STIs left undetected and untreated can lead to serious long-term health complications. During STI Awareness Month, Kalamazoo County HCS is drawing attention to the importance of testing, treatment, and prevention.

“In 2022, approximately 2,600 STI cases were reported in Kalamazoo County. These STI rates are consistently some of the highest in Michigan, yet we continue to be concerned that STI testing remains low,” said Kalamazoo County Health Educator Lindsay Merling. “We understand that the topic of STI testing may be uncomfortable for some. However, the sooner STIs are diagnosed and treated, the better. Nobody wants to deal with long-term health problems from untreated STIs. We encourage everyone to not only learn their own status, but to also talk with their family, friends, and loved ones about STI testing in a non-judgmental way—so that we can reduce the harmful stigma that surrounds these conversations.”

Without testing, many people may not know they have an STI due to the lack of symptoms in the early stages. Kalamazoo County HCS is urging all residents who are– or have been– sexually active to be tested for STIs. Early detection and treatment for STIs can prevent many of the harmful, long-term complications that result from lack of treatment, including:

- Infertility
- Increased risk of pregnancy complications
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
- Chronic pain
- Rashes
- Fatigue
- In the case of HPV, certain types of cancer

Another trend that is concerning health officials is [drug-resistant strains of STIs like gonorrhea](#). Drug-resistance happens when bacteria, fungi, or other germs develop the ability to resist or defeat the medications used to treat them. The [CDC estimates](#) that 1.6 million new cases of gonorrhea infections occur every year, and that half of these infections are resistant to at least one antibiotic. Today, the United States has just one recommended gonorrhea treatment remaining.

“While testing and treatment are essential tools in the toolbox of public health that we can use to halt the continued spread of STIs in our community, another essential tool is prevention,” said Merling.

“While we provide little-to-no-cost testing and treatment services for our community, we also provide free prevention tools such as condoms and dental dams here at the health department.”

Like other illnesses that spread from person to person, testing, treatment and prevention are public health tools that allow the disease intervention specialists at Kalamazoo County HCS to prevent the further spread of STIs in our community. Kalamazoo County HCS has dedicated staff that works with the community to help coordinate testing, treatment, education, and counseling about STIs. The Kalamazoo County [HCS STI Clinic](#), located at 311 E. Alcott Street, provides **confidential** STI testing and treatment to anyone 12 years and older, with no appointment necessary.

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