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Health officials stress importance of routine STI testing and vaccination to curb trends in Kalamazoo County

KALAMAZOO, Mich.— Like many other illnesses that spread from person to person, sexually transmitted infections can lead to serious, long-term health complications if left untreated. April, recognized as STI Awareness Month by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provides an opportunity to raise awareness about STIs, the stigma around them, and the trends impacting communities like Kalamazoo County.

“Sexually transmitted infections, like syphilis, can pass from mother to child during pregnancy if untreated, increasing the risk of preterm delivery, miscarriage, stillbirth, or even death shortly after birth,” said Dr. William Nettleton, Medical Director. “While routine testing and treatment during pregnancy reduces this risk, at least one case of congenital syphilis has occurred each year in Kalamazoo County since 2020, with a spike to five cases last year alone. It’s an alarming trend for a preventable disease.”

Since many STIs have no symptoms at all, testing is the only way to know if you, your partner, and even your unborn baby are safe. Early detection and treatment for anyone who is pregnant or sexually active can prevent many of the harmful complications that can result from STIs, including:

- Increased risk of pregnancy complications
- Hospitalization requiring IV antibiotics
- Infertility
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease
- Chronic pain
- Blindness

“Another important prevention tool against certain STIs, like Human Papilloma Virus, is vaccination,” Nettleton said. “The [HPV vaccine](#) can prevent throat, cervical, anal and penile cancers caused by HPV infection, and is recommended for children starting at age 9 to protect them later in life.”

Kalamazoo County residents of reproductive age can make an appointment for testing, treatment, education, and counseling about sexual health and pregnancy at the Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department [Family Planning Clinic](#), located at 311 E. Alcott Street. Additionally, the [STI Clinic](#) provides **confidential** testing and treatment to anyone 12 years and older, with no appointment necessary. Call 269-373-5200 to learn more.

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