



MEDIA RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 17, 2007

CONTACT: Julia Smith
Director of Communications
BC Persons With AIDS Society
Phone: 604.893.2209 **Cell:** 604.612.0222
Email: julias@bcpwa.org

Alarming Rate of New Syphilis Infections

VANCOUVER BC - Syphilis, a disease that was once nearly eradicated in North America, is on the rise again, and an alarming portion of new infections are among gay men.

The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control reports that in the past five years there has been a steady increase in the number of syphilis infections among men who have sex with men (MSM) in North America. In 2006, 46.5 percent of new syphilis infections in BC occurred in MSM of all ages. 64.5 percent of these MSM were HIV positive -- individuals who are more likely to present with later stages of syphilis.

“The gay, and especially the gay HIV-positive, community needs to be aware that syphilis is a serious infection that continues to spread,” says Glyn Townson, Chair of the British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society. “People need to get tested immediately, so that they can avoid infecting others and receive treatment.”

Syphilis, which is transmitted through intercourse and oral sex, usually presents first as a painless open sore called a chancre on the genitals, anus or mouth. The second stage of syphilis presents as a rash, often on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. However, it’s also entirely possible that people with syphilis may not have any symptoms at all, and may not be aware of their infection. Syphilis is treatable with antibiotics, and successful treatment will prevent the spread of the infection. It should be noted that syphilis is often a gateway for other sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

The best way of curbing the spread of syphilis is through practicing safer sex and frequent testing. Syphilis is detected by a blood test available at most clinics. MSM, both HIV-positive and HIV-negative, who are sexually active should get tested regularly.

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The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA Society), a non-profit, consumer-driven organization is in its 21th year of operation, is dedicated to empowering persons living with HIV disease and AIDS through mutual support and collective action. As western Canada's largest AIDS organization, with a membership of more than 4,400 HIV+ individuals, the Society provides support and advocacy services, treatment information, and volunteer opportunities to its diverse membership.