



## NEWS RELEASE

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### WAKE OFFICIALS CONCERNED BY RISE IN SYPHILIS

*(Editor's note: Wake County Public Health Division Director Dr. Sue Lynn Ledford is available for media interviews from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. today at Wake County Human Services Sunnybrook located at 10 Sunnybrook Road in Raleigh. HIV/STD Program Manager Yvonne Torres will be available to speak with Spanish-language media.)*

The number of Wake County residents infected with syphilis is at a 15-year high. From 2001 to 2014, the syphilis rate more than doubled.

"We are concerned about the alarming rise in syphilis cases," said Dr. Sue Lynn Ledford, public health division director at Wake County. "The outbreak is affecting people of all ages and backgrounds, and sexually risky online hookups may be contributing to the spread of new cases."

The most recent data available shows 233 people in Wake County were diagnosed with early syphilis in 2015.

"When patients visit our clinics complaining of symptoms consistent with syphilis, we ask them a series of questions to help inform our diagnosis," said Dr. Ledford. "Questions asked include a patient's number of sexual partners, as well as information on where they met those partners. A striking number of patients who are diagnosed with syphilis said they met their partners online."

Dr. Ledford is particularly concerned with the rise of syphilis cases involving sexual encounters between teenaged males and adult men, some of whom are also HIV positive.

In Wake County, 52.1 percent of those with syphilis also have HIV. Statistically, those individuals who have a sexually transmitted disease (STD), such as syphilis, are at a much higher risk of also testing positive for HIV in the future.

To address the public health crisis, Wake County's HIV/STD Community Program is putting a greater emphasis on:

- Encouraging and providing syphilis testing, outreach, education and condoms;
- Providing information through social media sites that are used for anonymous sex, as well as through Facebook;
- Encouraging parents to talk with their children about the risk of sexually transmitted diseases;
- Providing treatment for people with syphilis and their known partners; and
- Coordinating and sharing information with healthcare and community partners and other health departments across the state.

Wake County will host a free syphilis training for medical providers at 6 p.m. on March 22 at its location the Human Services Center, 10 Sunnybrook Road in Raleigh. Dr. Edward Hook III, an internationally recognized expert on syphilis management, will provide keynote remarks. To learn more and to register, please visit our [website](#).

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease caused by specific bacteria. Symptoms of the disease are painless sores or skin rashes that don't itch. If syphilis goes untreated, it can cause blindness, partial paralysis or immobility, damage to the brain and heart, or even death. Pregnant women with untreated syphilis are at risk of stillbirth or spreading the disease to their unborn child.

Anyone who has any kind of sex without protection can get syphilis.

If you live in Wake County and want to get information on testing and treatment for syphilis or HIV, call 919-250-3950 or visit the Wake County Human Services [website](#).

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