Alaska Targets Gonorrhea Infection Rates Through EPT

Alaska implemented expedited partner therapy to reduce gonococcal infection rates.

Alaska has one of the highest rates of chlamydia in the country. A few years ago, researchers found that the state’s gonorrhea rates were also increasing. By 2010, Alaska’s gonorrhea rates were the third highest in the nation. The health department addressed this issue proactively by requesting assistance from CDC’s Epidemic Intelligence Service (Epi-Aid) to investigate whether expedited partner therapy (EPT) would be appropriate and effective in Alaska. EPT is the practice of treating partners of patients diagnosed with chlamydia or gonorrhea through providing medications to the initial patient to take to his/her sex partner. After an extensive knowledge, attitudes, and practices survey was administered to healthcare providers and the data were analyzed, Epi-Aid and the Alaska Section of Epidemiology determined that an EPT program could be successful in the state.

Steps Taken:
- After reviewing Alaska’s chlamydia and gonorrhea rates, the epidemiology section looked nationally to see what programs could benefit the population and reduce rates of gonorrhoea and chlamydia.
- Alaska partnered with Epi-Aid to help evaluate whether EPT would be appropriate in the state.
- The provider survey analyzing knowledge, attitudes, and practices enlisted provider opinions and provide baseline knowledge.
- Epidemiologic findings were published in Alaska’s epidemiology report, Bulletin (http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/bulletins/docs/b2012_11.pdf), and press releases were disseminated to inform the public and generate interest in STD prevention.

Results:
- In 2011, the gonorrhea rate decreased in all racial groups and in four of Alaska’s six geographic regions.
- In 2011, the chlamydia rate decreased by 5 percent—Alaska’s largest annual decrease ever recorded.
- In 2012, the Alaska State Legislature provided $350,000 per year for three years to the Alaska HIV/STD Program to reduce the burden of gonorrhea and chlamydia in Alaska by increasing testing, treatment (including EPT support), and public education about STDs.
- Alaska saw a 22% decrease in case numbers in 2011 compared to the previous year
- A 25% decrease in case rates was observed from 2010 to 2011.

Lessons Learned:
- Factors that likely contributed to the decreases in gonorrhea and chlamydia rates include the following:
  - Increased provider awareness.
  - Increased empiric treatment for suspected cases.
  - Increased public awareness.
  - More patients seeking services.
- EPT is an effective partner management tool in Alaska, particularly among patients unwilling or unable to participate in timely partner services and in specific geographic areas where partner services are not readily available.
• This model serves as an example of a state that was able to effectively evaluate its current data trends and take action quickly.

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