World AIDS Day

December 1st marks the 17th Annual World AIDS Day. It's an important time to remember the lives lost to this terrible disease. But remembrance doesn't do justice to the more than 500 Idahoans who passed away and the estimated 1,300 currently living with HIV or AIDS; we must be the vanguard of eliminating AIDS as well. To do so, we need to look seriously at the factors that perpetuate this disease.

Many people are not aware of the connection between the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and the persistence of HIV. Scientific evidence indicates that people with an STD are far more likely to get HIV, if exposed. STDs weaken the immune system and cause open wounds that can serve as entry points for HIV into the uninfected. Moreover, a new study shows that HIV medications are not as effective in controlling HIV in patients with STDs.

Young people, 15-25, and men who have sex with men are most at risk for HIV and STD. Knowing this makes the rising number of STD cases in Idaho all the more alarming:

- Chlamydia cases increased nearly 25% over the last five years.
- Cases of gonorrhea reported in 2011 were 9% higher than the ten year average.
- Since June 2011, over 50 new syphilis cases have been reported.

Additionally, syphilis might be facilitating transmission of HIV. Among those recently diagnosed with syphilis, twelve new cases of HIV were also found. Because of common risk and biologic factors, increases in STD rates can be closely followed by increases in HIV rates.

So what do we do with this information about the link between HIV and STDs? We can act on this knowledge and practice safe sex. That includes:

- Having only one sex partner who only has sex with you;
- Using condoms because condoms are effective at preventing STD and HIV;
- Testing regularly for HIV and other STDs if you're sexually active; and
- If you are positive for HIV, getting prompt medical care and treatment.

Please be responsible for your sexual health and your partner's. And talk to your health care provider about getting tested for HIV and other STDs. Remember, the most common symptom of an STD and HIV is no symptom. So chat with your provider today, and let's make HIV, AIDS and other STDs a thing of the past!

For World AIDS Day events in your area, please click here.

For testing local testing centers, click here.

For more information, please click here.