

# Sexually transmitted infections in Ottawa, 2011



## Knowledge to Action Report

Fall 2011

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Ottawa Public Health aims to prevent and control the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Ottawa— as well as promote healthy sexuality among Ottawa's youth and adult population.

*OPH's Sexually Transmitted Infections in Ottawa, 2011 Report* provides a picture of 12 types of STIs in Ottawa, which are referred to as 'reportable' STIs because OPH is mandated to collect data on these STIs. The report highlights the number of cases, incidence rates by age and sex, 10-year averages, comparisons to the rest of Ontario, and a neighbourhood analysis of chlamydia. The report aims to inform OPH's Sexual Health Strategy, as well as to help OPH work with community stakeholders to reduce the number of STIs in Ottawa. Identifying the most common risk factors associated with acquiring an STI allows OPH to better target programming and provides a complete picture of the factors associated with these infections.

Chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, hepatitis B and C, and HIV are STIs that are caused by bacteria or viruses found in body fluids such as semen and vaginal secretions and, in some

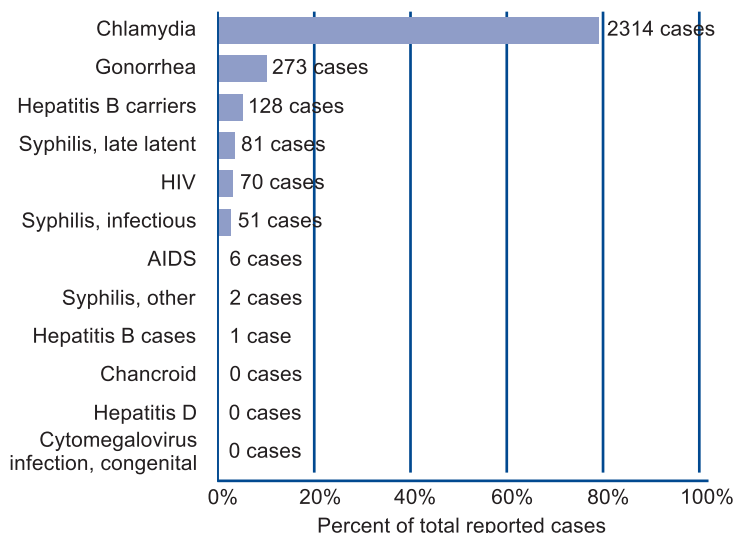
cases, breast milk and saliva. Transmission of these infections occurs primarily from person to person through sexual contact.

Unfortunately, evidence increasingly shows that many infected individuals are not aware that they have an STI. For example, among people infected with chlamydia, 70% of women and 50% of men do not show any symptoms. Without regular testing for STIs, a lack of awareness of infection allows infections to spread to others unchecked. Even in the absence of symptoms, STIs can cause pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility or damage to other internal organs. Therefore, detection and early treatment are important for everyone infected.

### Impact on the health of Ottawa's residents

In 2010, there were 2,926 cases of reportable STIs in Ottawa, as outlined in Figure 1. The most commonly reported STI was chlamydia, which represented almost 80% of all reported STIs in 2010.

**Figure 1 – Reported cases (% of all cases) of sexually transmitted infections, Ottawa, 2010**



Source: iPHIS, Ottawa Public Health, data extracted June 20, 2011

Of note, there were more new cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis (infectious and latent) in Ottawa in 2010 than in any one year over the last ten years. There were, however, fewer cases of HIV and hepatitis B. Compared to the rest of Ontario, Ottawa had higher rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV and syphilis (infectious and latent).

## The most affected residents

Ottawa residents, depending on age, gender and sexual orientation are affected by different types of STIs (see Table 1). Younger adults are disproportionately affected by chlamydia and gonorrhea; young gay men have higher rates of HIV; whereas 40-44 year old gay men are more affected by infectious syphilis than other groups. In addition, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, HIV and syphilis mostly affect men, and more women are affected by chlamydia.

**Table 1 – Most affected residents by type of STI, newly diagnosed cases**

|                     | 20-24 | 25-29 | 30-34 | 35-39 | 40-44 | Women | Men |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Chlamydia           | X     |       |       |       |       | X     |     |
| Gonorrhea           | X     |       |       |       |       |       | X   |
| HIV                 |       | X     |       |       |       |       | X   |
| Infectious syphilis |       |       |       |       | X     |       | X   |
| Chronic hepatitis B |       |       | X     |       |       |       | X   |
| Acute hepatitis B   |       |       |       | X     |       |       | X   |

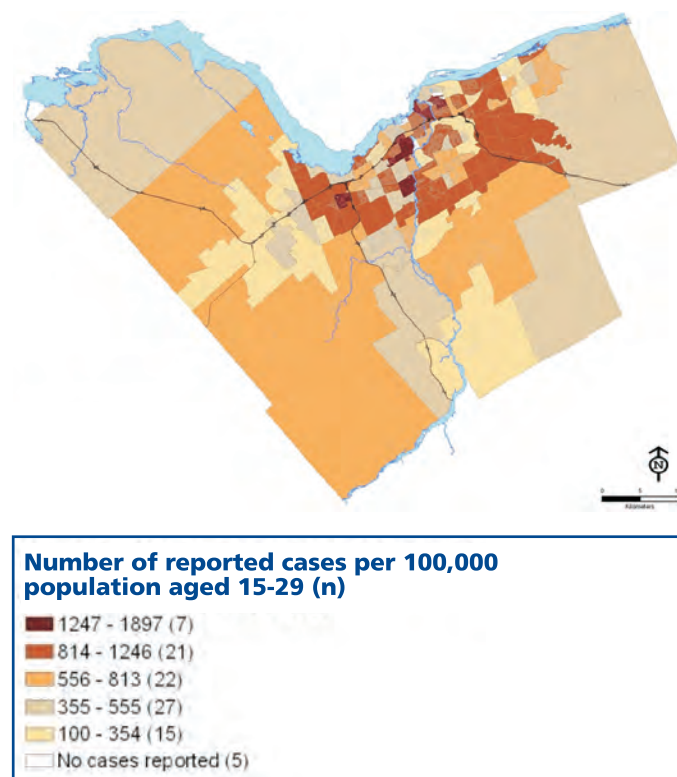
## The most affected areas in Ottawa

There are geographical regions within Ottawa that have higher rates of chlamydia (see Map 1), the most reported STI in Ottawa, which may indicate a

need for more accessible services in these areas. The highest rates (number per 100,000 people) of reported cases of chlamydia among 15-29 year olds in 2010 occurred in the following neighbourhoods, listed from highest rate to lowest rate:

- Byward Market
- Vanier South
- Sandy Hill – Ottawa East
- Vanier North
- Civic Hospital – Central Park
- Bells Corners East
- Hunt Club South Industrial

**Map 1: Map of reported cases of chlamydia per 100,000 population by neighbourhood, 15 to 29 year olds, Ottawa 2010.**



## How people are exposed

In 2010, the most common risk factors for acquiring one or more of the reportable STIs were:

- No condom used
- New sexual partner in past two months
- More than one sexual partner in the last six months
- Men who have sex with men

Risk factors vary by STI, with chlamydia and gonorrhea being transmitted mainly through heterosexual encounters without the use of condoms, whereas HIV and syphilis tend to be transmitted mainly among men having sex with men. In 2009, almost half (42%) of 15 to 29 year olds in Ottawa reported that they had not used a condom the last time they had sex. In 2007-2008, 37% of those who had had sex reported having had more than one sexual partner in the previous 12 months.

## Reducing STIs in Ottawa

OPH currently provides sexual health treatment, counselling and a wide variety of programs and services. These services are provided at OPH's main sexual health clinic, located at 179 Clarence Street clinic, a number of satellite clinics in schools, community health centres, resource centres as well as bathhouses throughout Ottawa. OPH will continue to work with community stakeholders to reduce the rates of STIs in our community through providing testing for and treatment of STIs, anonymous HIV testing, following up on all cases and their sexual partners, providing counseling as well as disseminating health promotion messaging to the broader community.



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### OPH aims to enhance sexual health services through:

- Byward Market
- Vanier South
- Sandy Hill – Ottawa East
- Vanier North

### Improve access to OPH's sexual health services

In 2011, OPH renovated the main sexual health clinic, which enabled over 14,600 client visits in the first three quarters of 2011. This is the highest volume of clinic visits since the clinic first opened in the 1980s. In addition, two new community-based sexual health clinics were opened in Kanata and Barrhaven, in collaboration with the Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre, to better serve clients outside the city core. Two additional clinics will be opened in 2012 in Orleans and Pinecrest-Queensway area.

### Implement a campaign to promote condom use

OPH distributes over 900,000 condoms every year and is currently planning to enhance its existing condom program to increase access to condoms among young adults. This new campaign will be launched in 2012 in partnership with other health service organizations, schools and non-traditional partners. The goal is to increase awareness and distribution of condoms to help reduce the incidence of STIs and unplanned pregnancies among Ottawa's youth.



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### Build Skills and Capacity of Health Care Providers, Parents and Schools

It is important that safer sex messages for young adults come from a variety of trusted sources such as parents, teachers, and health care providers. As such, OPH is working with school boards, teachers and health care providers to build their skills, knowledge and comfort-level required to promote safer sex messages among youth. Increasing the capacity of parents, schools and health care providers to discuss sexual health with

young people can reduce the stigma associated with sexual issues, and lead to improved overall sexual health of youth.



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### Use New Technology to Raise Awareness about Sexual Health

In March 2011, OPH was the first Canadian city to launch an on-line chlamydia and gonorrhea testing service, where people can get a test “requisition” from a website instead of having to go to their doctor to get one. The website has had almost 10,000 website hits and has resulted in testing of many young adults who may not have normally accessed testing. There is also a text-messaging service linked to the site to provide 24 hour access to safer sex messages through cell-phone text messages. In the fall, OPH's sexual health program will launch its own Twitter account to raise awareness of OPH's sexual health services and further increase safer sex messaging.



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### Work Together to Strengthen Community Action

OPH has worked with several community partners to enhance community programming and services aimed at reducing rates of STIs, including HIV, in Ottawa. In response to an increase in HIV among young gay men, OPH along with AIDS bureau and youth service organizations and young gay men, are developing a coordinated approach to address the issue. In addition, a new HIV Testing Blitz campaign, funded by the Ontario AIDS Bureau will provide an additional 200 hours of access to OPH HIV testing services to gay men in Ottawa. The purpose of the “Get on it” campaign is to provide gay and bisexual men with the information they need to make an informed decision about whether or not they need to be tested, and when to be tested for HIV and syphilis.



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### Consultation with community partners

OPH provides a variety of health promotion and outreach initiatives to both the general population and priority populations to ensure accessible, cost-effective and evidence-based health promotion approaches. OPH achieves this through working collaboratively with community agencies such as community health centres, Ottawa school boards, youth service organisations such as Youth Services Bureau, and the AIDS Committee of Ottawa. OPH's partners play a significant role in developing programs and distributing sexual health information as well as information about OPH's programs and services to intended clients and groups.