

New & Noteworthy

January Newsletter The Dogs Are Talking Monthly Dispatch January, 2008

Happy New Year! We are very happy to start the year off on a positive note, and we can because we've got great news: it looks like **syphilis is continuing to decline**.

That's right, following years of coordinated prevention efforts, San Francisco is seeing a dramatic decline in syphilis cases. After peaking in 2004 with 551 cases, declines in reported syphilis began in 2005 and continued through 2006. But even more recently, from January through October 2007, 292 cases of early syphilis were reported, a **21% decline from the same period in 2006**.

Among the early syphilis cases reported to date for 2007, 97% were male and 88% were men who have sex with men (MSM). 63% of the cases with known HIV status were HIV-infected.

We Can't Stop Now

292 cases should not be taken lightly, however. Now is the time to redouble our efforts to get everyone tested, so that we can completely eradicate syphilis from our community. The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) recommends that all sexually active gay and bisexual men be screened for syphilis at least once a year, and that men with multiple partners get tested for syphilis every 3–6 months.

Because syphilis can increase HIV viral load and decrease CD4 T cell counts, sexually active HIV-infected men should get syphilis tests with all routine blood draws. It is also important to remember that unprotected anal sex between HIV-positive persons can expose both partners to syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and other STDs.

Free syphilis testing is available at www.STDTest.org. Let's make 2008 the year we wipe out syphilis.

Stubby Says "Get Tested"

In this month's Dogs Are Talking ad, French Bulldog Stubby (casting call participant no. 32) reminds us of the importance of regular syphilis testing, especially when romance awaits. Please heed Stubby's advice and have a healthy STD-free Valentine's Day.

Help Spread the Word

Remember, if you like a particular poster or you know the perfect spot for it, please don't hesitate to download it from our website. All our posters are available to be downloaded at any time, and we want you to hang them up all over town—don't let any wall space go to waste! Help us remind gay and bisexual men to get tested for syphilis.

Dogs Are Talking Seeks New Community Partners in 2008

Do you have access to an audience within your neighborhood or community? Or would

you just like to help us get the word out? Either way, we hope you will consider becoming a community partner or a Dogs Are Talking campaign sponsor. We plan to strengthen our campaign by increasing community participation over the year ahead. If we all work together, we can get rid of syphilis in San Francisco. Give Promotions West a call at 415.255.0800 or send an email to info@dogsaretalking.com. We'd love to hear from you today.

BUMP SF

In September of last year, the Dogs Are Talking Monthly Dispatch reported on the connection between syphilis infection and the use of methamphetamines. Data from the San Francisco Department of Public Health suggest that half of new HIV infections and syphilis cases in gay men and other men who have sex with men can be attributed to methamphetamine use. However, public health officials believe the true percentage to be higher, given the current constraints of their data collection.

About 1 in 5 gay men in San Francisco have used meth in the past 3–6 months, and about 1 in 20 uses meth at least once a week. Meth has a wide range of negative health effects, including erectile dysfunction, paranoia, rapid heart rate, tooth loss, and depression. Meth also affects sexual health by making it easier for men to forget to take medication and to engage in risky sexual behavior like not using condoms.

Now the health department is enrolling gay and bisexual men in an ongoing study to find out whether the use of daily medication will help men reduce or quit meth use. The study, entitled BUMP, is being led by Dr. Grant Colfax, Director of the HIV Prevention Section. This particular study will not tell us whether or not medication helps guys reduce risky sexual behavior due to meth use. However, it will pave the way for larger studies that will address that important question.

Men who are interested should contact the confidential BUMP study line at 415–554–9013 or visit www.sfbump.com.

Do You Know Someone Who Needs Help?

It can be devastating to watch a friend's quality of life erode owing to the use of methamphetamines. Meth use affects so many people in someone's life—friends, co-workers, buddies, family members, boyfriends, partners. It can be very difficult to know what to do, or how to help, and how to deal with all the emotions that arise for both of you.

Drawtheline.org's Buddies Program provides a safe space for people who want to work out these challenges. We share information about meth and its effects, exchange coping strategies, and talk about ways to reduce the stress and harm for those dealing with the day-to-day consequences of crystal meth.

Topics discussed include: why people use, myths and misconceptions about meth use and users, how and when to have "difficult conversations," how to communicate effectively, how to set boundaries and take care of yourself, how to access treatment and recovery services, how to obtain personal support, and how to create an ongoing support network for ourselves and within the larger gay community.

For more information, visit drawtheline.org/buddies or contact Buzz Bense at gaymenshealth-sf@earthlink.net.

EROS Releases New Gay Sex Resource

Sex club EROS, at 2051 Market Street in San Francisco, is celebrating its 15th Anniversary by distributing a new back-pocket guide to gay sexual health. The postcard-sized resource is entitled "A Safer Sex Guide for Gay Men" and contains subsections such as: "Be Good to Your Body," "Know Your Boundaries," "Get Tested and Communicate," and "Protect Yourself and Play Safe." It specifically covers safe sex at sex clubs. The card will be distributed at EROS, throughout the community, and on a new section of the www.erossf.com website.

Newsletter Archive: August, September, October, November, December

Contact us at info@dogsaretalking.com

STDtest.org | sfcityclinic.org | 415.487.5580

