

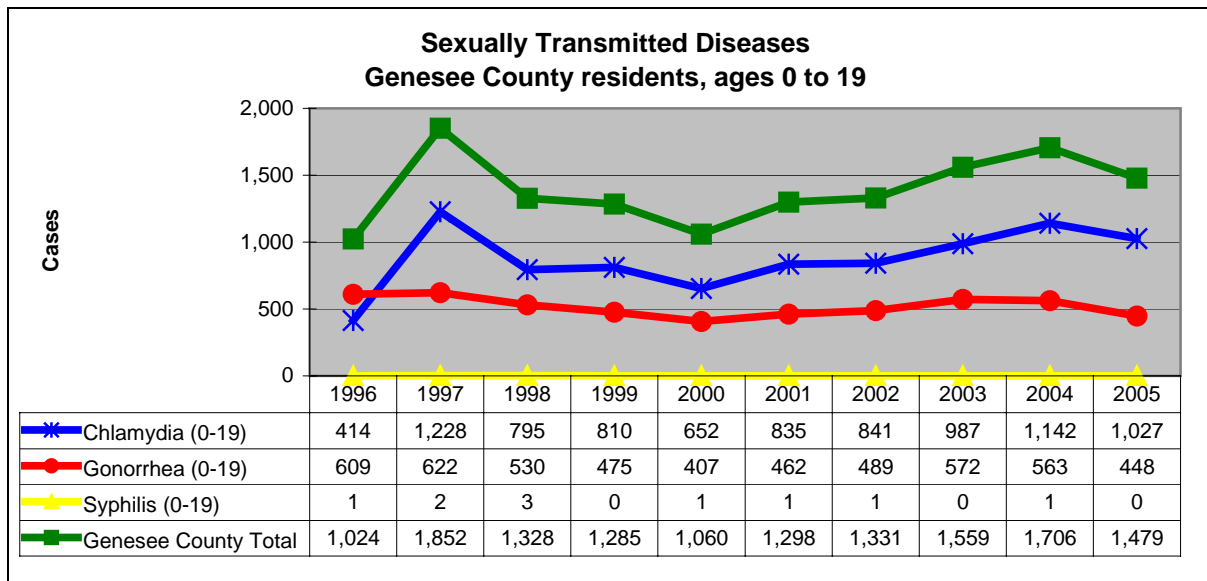


Mission: To improve the quality of life for children and families in Genesee County through assessment, awareness, advocacy and action.

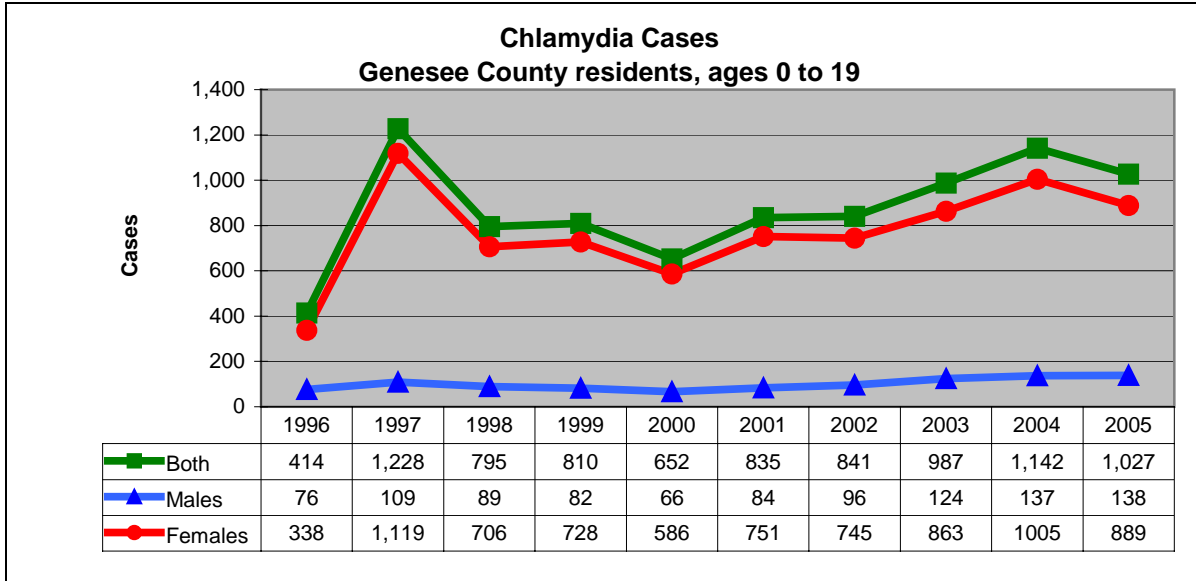
Fact Sheet 5.2 Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually transmitted diseases place youth at risk for poor health and reproductive outcomes in later life. The frequency of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) also reflects this population’s ongoing need for access to reproductive health services. Increases in the detection and treatment of STIs can yield benefits not only to those infected, but to others through improved control over the spread of STIs over time.

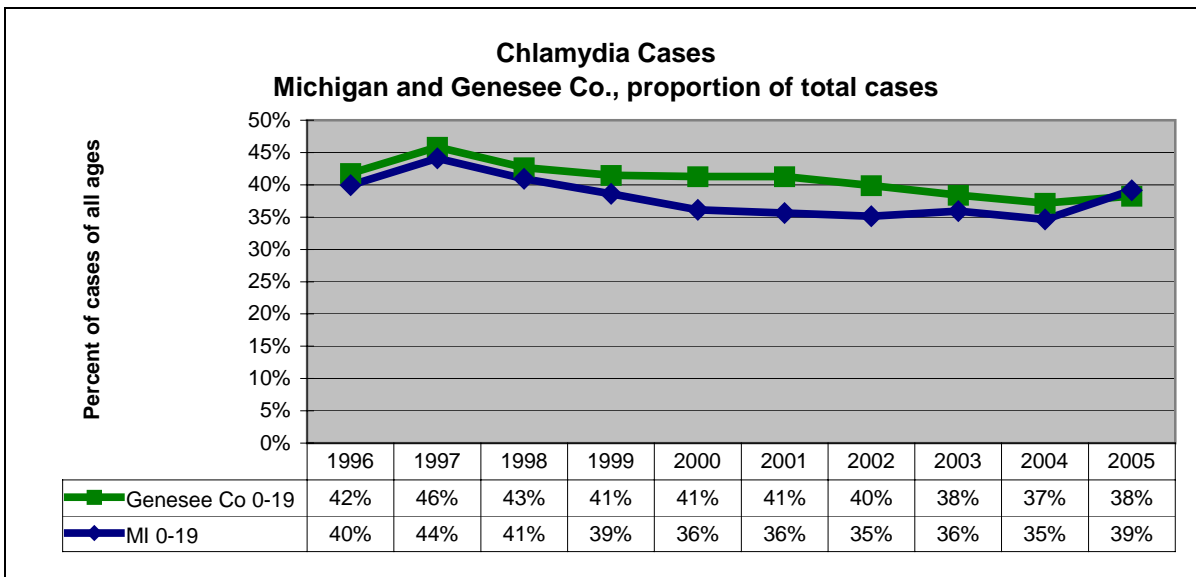
According to DCH, “although sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are the most frequently reported communicable diseases in Michigan, they are believed to be underreported because patients are often asymptomatic and do not seek health care. Moreover, since STD reporting is laboratory based, STDs are often not reported if a physician does not order a lab test and treats because of symptoms or sexual contact with an infected person. STD rates are also largely associated with available resources for screening and testing in public health clinics. Currently, Michigan’s surveillance system for STDs is inadequate because it does not collect sufficient demographic data and risk behavior information to characterize the affected population. Rates rise and fall as resources are allocated for STD services, making analysis of trends over time problematic. Currently, dedicated resources are not adequately allocated for the systematic collection and epidemiological analysis of these data.”¹



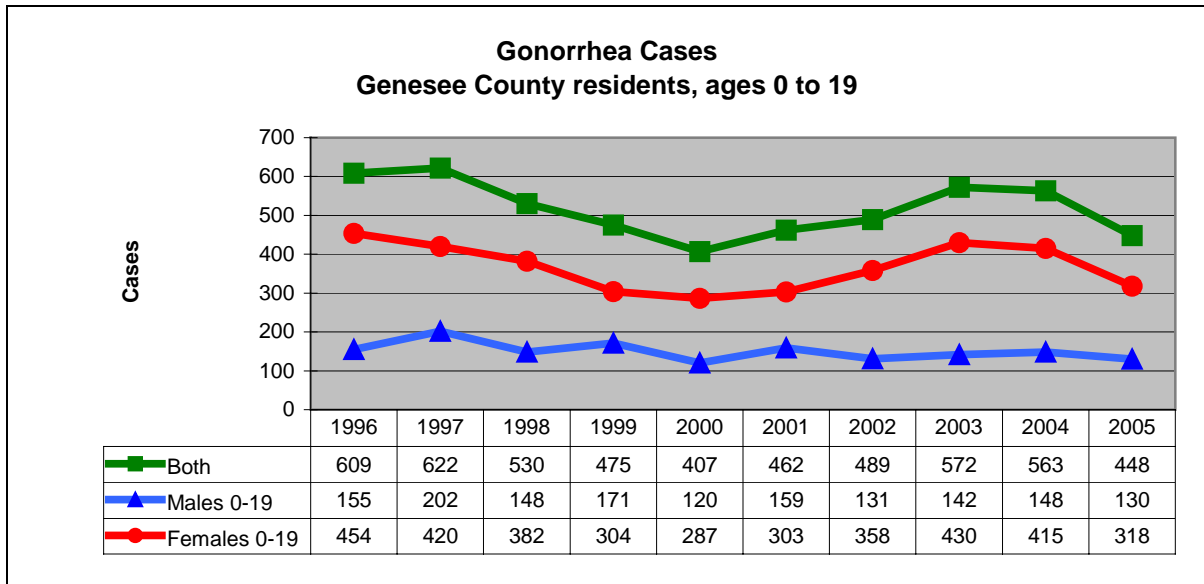
Fact Sheet 5.2: Sexually Transmitted Diseases continued...



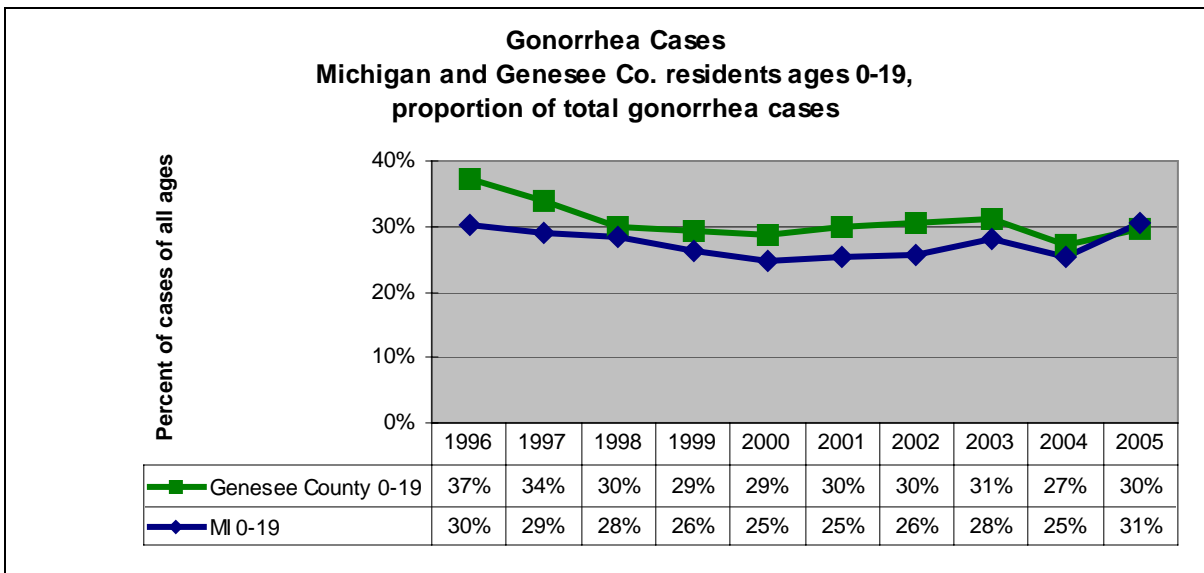
- Cases of chlamydia have been steadily increasing in young people in Genesee County over the past five years, particularly in females.



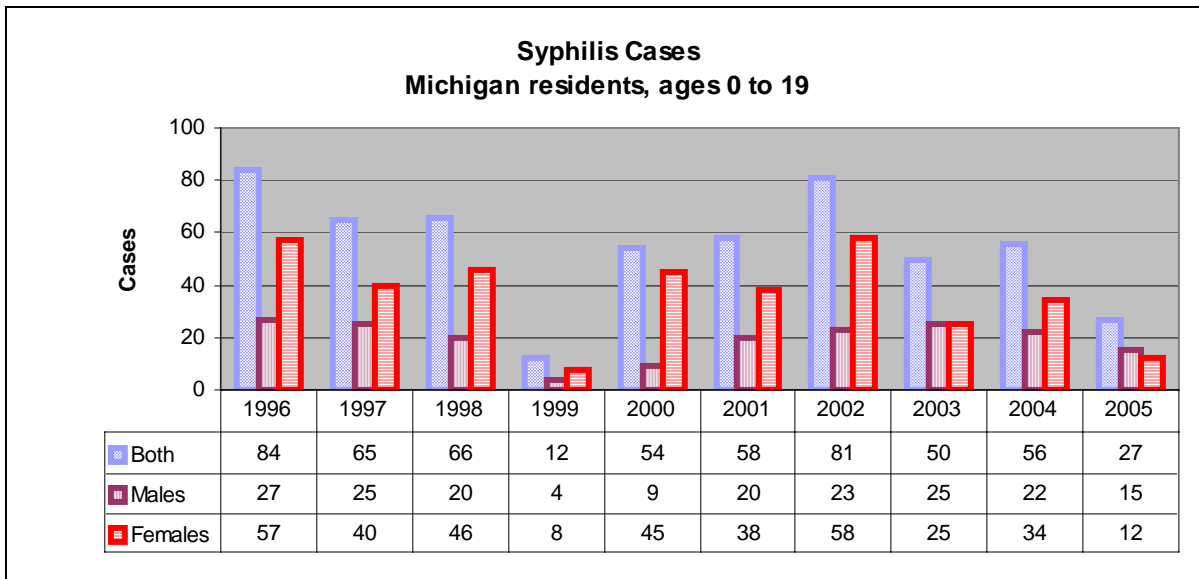
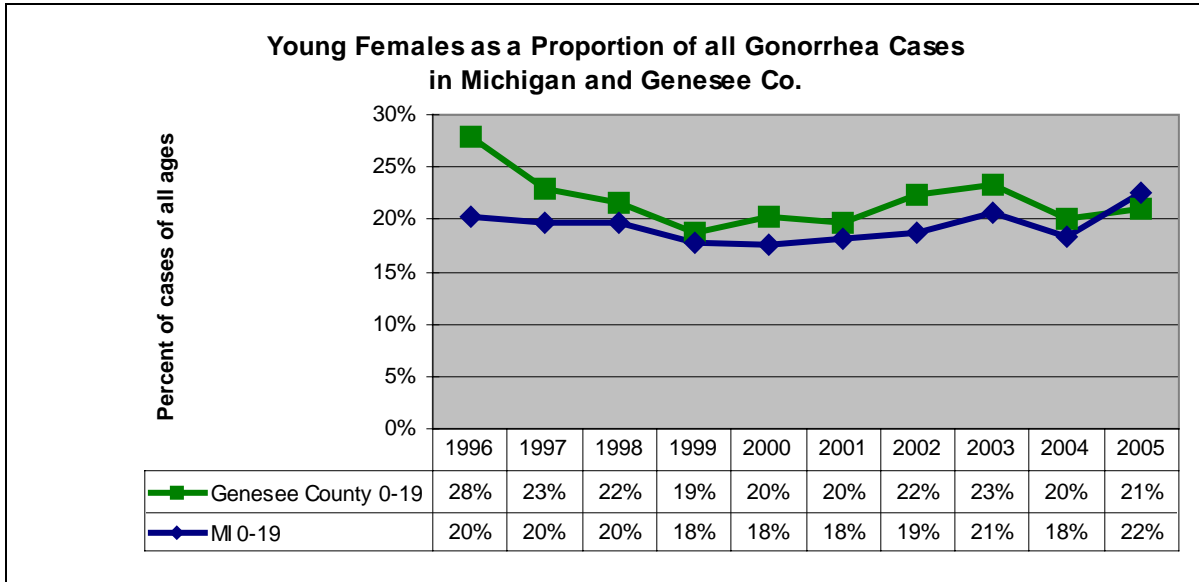
Fact Sheet 5.2: Sexually Transmitted Diseases continued...



- In young people in Genesee County, numbers of cases of gonorrhea in females have been variable while holding steady (and much less common) among males.



Fact Sheet 5.2: Sexually Transmitted Diseases continued...



- Syphilis continues to be relatively rare, both in Genesee County and in Michigan as a whole. Unlike most STDs, syphilis is more common among males than females.

BEYOND THE NUMBERS

In this complex arena, statistics give us some information, but also raise questions. In the incidences of syphilis, for example, use of an effective drug (penicillin) is working. The level of syphilis is fairly stable, with low numbers of reported cases. With other STIs (sexually transmitted infections), the numbers are growing throughout the state and in Genesee County, with the County showing slightly higher rates than the state as a whole. What factors contribute to this occurrence? Young females are the population sub group representing the greatest increase in each of the STIs. This is unexplained, and this question also should be addressed.

Fact Sheet 5.2: Sexually Transmitted Diseases continued...

There is probably no one explanation for the stories that the statistics tell. But among the considerations as we decide how to use the statistics are the following:

- Are the evident increases or decreases a function of reporting, screening or true representations of what is happening?
- Statistics may illustrate what is happening with the numbers that can be accounted for, but may not be an accurate indicator of the health of the population.
- And lastly, resources play a role both in treatment and reporting patterns. There are probably some conclusions to be drawn before deciding upon any course(s) of action in this area.

EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTION EFFORTS

Under the direction of the Genesee County Health Department and with support from the Ruth Mott Foundation, a coalition of individuals has been formed to address this area of concern for Genesee County. For more information, contact the Genesee County Health Department at 810-257-3427.

A recent review of “abstinence-only” evaluations found that “there do not currently exist any abstinence-only programs with reasonably strong evidence that they actually delay the initiation of sex or reduce its frequency.” However, other research does suggest that particular abstinence strategies appear to delay the onset of sexual activity; however, this good news is tempered by finding of negative health consequences for some youth.

For example, in the last decade teenagers across the United States have participated in formal and informal virginity movements in which teens pledge virginity until marriage. Recent studies have shown that this movement has been successful in delaying the onset of intercourse among young pledgers on average by nearly 18 months but pledging has no effect among older teens (18 and older). Further, pledgers were less likely than a comparison group to use contraceptives once they had intercourse, and thereby were at greater risk for sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. In contrast, evaluations of programs that combine abstinence education with contraceptive information find that they can help delay the onset of intercourse with a concomitant concern regarding health risk.

Programs, such as the Carrera Program, which provides a holistic approach to teen sexuality have shown the most promising results in reducing teen pregnancy rates and rates of STI's in addition to improving overall life skills for youth.

Data definition: Number of cases reported by outpatient clinics, hospitals, doctor's offices and other health facilities. These cases represent testing for Michigan residents whether testing occurred within the State of Michigan or in other states.

Source: Michigan Department of Community Health.

References: Douglas Kirky, *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, May 2001 and Peter Bearman and Hannah Bruckner, “Virginity Pledges as They Affect The Transition to First Intercourse,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 106, No 4, 2001. John B. Jemmott III, Loretta Sweet Jemmott, and Geoffrey T. Fong, “Abstinence and Safer Sex HIV Risk-Reduction Interventions for African-American Adolescents, A Randomized Control Trail,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 279, May 20, 2998.

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