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Health Department Encourages Getting Screened During National STD Awareness Month

Free screening, testing services offered throughout April

BALTIMORE, MD (April 7, 2010) – The Baltimore City Health Department is announcing an emphasis on increased STD screening in conjunction with National STD Awareness Month. A new mobile outreach program van will provide screenings throughout the city during the month of April and participate in screening and education events at Baltimore City Community College and Morgan State and Coppin State Universities.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD) pose a serious public health threat to Americans, particularly young women, African Americans, men who have sex with men (MSM) and individuals living in poverty or have limited access to healthcare. STDs cost the United States' health care system as much as \$15.3 billion annually.

“There are many effective ways to prevent, diagnose and treat STDs,” said Interim Commissioner Farrow. “STD screening and early diagnoses are vital to preventing serious health consequences and to slow the rate of transmission.”

Approximately 19 million new sexually transmitted infections occur every year in the United States – and almost half of these are among young people aged 15 to 24, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Baltimore has a disproportionately high rate of disease compared to the nation. In 2009, Baltimore reported 7,893 cases of chlamydia, 2,889 cases of gonorrhea and 240 cases of early syphilis.

STDs such as chlamydia and gonorrhea are major causes of infertility among women. These and other common STDs can increase the risk of HIV transmission for both women and men.

Screening is particularly important since many STDs often have no signs or symptoms. CDC recommends annual chlamydia screening for sexually active women under the age of 26. The CDC also recommends annual HIV, syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhea screening for sexually active MSM. More frequent testing is urged for individuals engaging in high-risk behavior. The Health Department's Mobile Outreach Program van provides HIV and STD testing in the Baltimore City communities with high rates of HIV and STDs. The BCHD Mobile Outreach Program has provided more than 60,000 HIV and syphilis tests during its 5-year existence.

Clients who are tested generally lack access to a health care provider. More than 4,875 clients have been tested since the new mobile unit was put into service on October 31.

The van's April schedule is posted on our Web site at <http://www.baltimorehealth.org> or by calling 410-396-4448.

Testing and treatment also is offered free at two Baltimore City Health Department clinics located at 1515 W. North Ave. (410-396-0176) and 620 N. Caroline St. (410-396-9840). The mobile testing van provides screening throughout the community.

Other testing sites and information on STDs can be accessed by calling 1-800-232-4636. Free test kits for chlamydia and gonorrhea can be obtained by visiting www.IWANTTHEKIT.org or calling 1-866-575-5504. Additional information on STDs is also available at <http://www.CDC.gov/STD> and <http://www.itsyoursexlife.com>.

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