

4.1.1. STD Rates

Because STDs, such as syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia, are reportable diseases in all states, complete and accurate information is readily available for use in estimating HIV/AIDS rates. Caution must be used, however, in interpreting available STD data. The reporting of STDs is likely to be most complete among persons receiving STD services in the public sector. Data may not necessarily represent all persons with STDs and/or who are engaging in unsafe sexual practices. Nevertheless, they are useful as HIV/AIDS surrogates.

Data for Tennessee from January to December, 1995, from the Tennessee Department of Health, STD/HIV Program, show decreasing overall rates of all STDs, except chlamydia, from 1994 to 1995 throughout the fourteen Health Department Regions of the State. Chlamydia rates increased by nearly 94% during calendar year 1995 over 1994 levels. Rates were 63% higher in metropolitan areas of the State, and increased by approximately 182% in non-metropolitan areas. Increases were attributed by TDH STD/HIV program staff to increased testing availability. Rates of primary, secondary and latent syphilis have declined statewide from 1994 to 1995, by about 13%. However, non-metropolitan rates of primary and secondary syphilis increased by 8.5% from 1994 to 1995. Rates of gonorrhea have decreased from 1994 to 1995 by nearly 12% statewide, with a decline of nearly 7% in non-metropolitan area and about 13% in metropolitan areas. Knox County was the only metropolitan area showing an increase (38%) in gonorrhea cases from 1994 to 1995.

Shelby County, in combination with the other major metropolitan areas of the State (Davidson, Hamilton, Knox and Madison Counties), represented 84% to 89% of all syphilis cases reported annually since 1990.⁴² The metropolitan regions have consistently accounted for 81-85% of reported gonorrhea cases in Tennessee during this time period. The report states, further, that STD rates for both black males and black females were disproportionately high. Blacks, who make up 16% of the State's population, consistently represented about 90% of reported syphilis cases and 87% of all reported gonorrhea cases. Black females accounted for 50% of chlamydia cases and white females for 38%.

4.1.2. Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B cases may also provide information on mode of HIV exposure risk, such as men having sex with men and injecting drug use. Hepatitis B, like HIV, is transmitted by sexual contact, exposure to blood and perinatally. While it is a reportable disease in nearly all states, reporting may not be uniformly complete. It may be useful, however, to look at trends in hepatitis B cases as a reflection of changes in behavior

⁴² TDH. "STD/HIV Program Progress Report". July, 1996.