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CDC Announces Alarming Rates of Drug-Resistance for a Common STD
Activists Call for Greater Investment in Neglected Federal STD Budget, a Revitalized Drug Development Process, and an End to Harmful Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

New York, NY – AIDS activists are calling on Congress to improve the federal effort to prevent and treat sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), responding to new data on rising rates of drug-resistant gonorrhea. Noting that gonorrhea increases the risk of transmitting and acquiring HIV, they emphasized that strengthening federal investment in STD programs must be a vital component of our national HIV prevention strategy.

“The Bush administration’s response to STDs in the US has ranged from apathetic to actively harmful, which the new Congress has the opportunity to reverse. This data is yet another wake-up call that the federal STD budget has been neglected for too long,” said Sean Barry, Director of Prevention Policy for the Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP). STD and AIDS advocacy groups are calling for an additional \$110 million for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) STD prevention budget, bringing total funding to \$267 million, which would expand programs that monitor, prevent, and treat gonorrhea and other STDs.

An article in the April 13th Morbidity and Mortality Weekly (MMWR) documents that drug-resistant gonorrhea is now widespread around the country, triggering CDC to issue revised treatment guidelines. The new guidelines limit the recommended treatment for gonorrhea to a single class of antibiotic drugs. Acknowledging the low profit incentive for the development of new drugs to treat gonorrhea and other common bacterial infections, activists urged the Senate to pass the *Food and Drug Administration Revitalization Act*, which would expand incentives for research into promising but ignored antibiotics.

An estimated 700,000 people in the US are infected with gonorrhea each year, which makes it the second most commonly reported infectious disease. Although overall rates of gonorrhea declined during the 1990s due to increased condom use, CDC reported a 42% jump in prevalence in eight Western states from 2000 to 2005 in an article in the March 16th MMWR.

Sex education is also a concern for activists who fear that advances that have been made in reducing the rates of some STDs are being reversed due to the Bush administration’s focus on so-called abstinence-only programs. A 2004 report by Congressman Henry Waxman’s staff found that federally-funded abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula contained “major errors and distortion of public health information,” including inaccurate information about STDs. “Congress has the opportunity for a new and science-based direction when it comes to sex education in our public schools, which they can do by eliminating funding for abstinence-only programs and creating the first federal funding stream for comprehensive sex education by passing the *Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act*,” said Lei Chou, CHAMP’s Director of Mobilization.

CHAMP is a national HIV prevention activist and training organization with offices in New York City, Los Angeles, and Providence, RI.

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