



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**News Release**

**NEIL ABERCROMBIE**  
GOVERNOR

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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH WARNS OF POSSIBLE SYPHILIS  
OUTBREAK ON BIG ISLAND OF HAWAII**

HONOLULU — The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) is investigating five cases of syphilis reported over the past five months primarily on the Big Island of Hawaii. On June 10, DOH sent a medical advisory to physicians statewide to raise awareness regarding this possible syphilis outbreak. Although most of the cases were reported in men who have sex with men in West Hawaii, cases related to this outbreak may develop on the other islands.

“While we know there are several cases from West Hawaii, there may be people who are infected and unaware of their illness, who have traveled to other islands,” said Luke Hasty, program coordinator for the STD/AIDS Prevention Branch of the DOH. “A blood test is the most common way to determine if someone has syphilis.”

Syphilis is a sexually-transmitted disease (STD) passed from one person to another by a specific bacterium during unprotected sexual contact. Syphilis can cause long-term complications and/or death if not adequately treated. Early signs of syphilis, often a small ulcer or sore on the sex organ, may be overlooked as the ulcer is often painless and may go away on its own. Signs and symptoms of syphilis that develop later on often mimic symptoms due to more common disorders (symptoms such as skin rashes, mouth sores, fever, sore throat, muscle aches and fatigue) and are often missed or resolve without treatment.

Timely antibiotic treatment provides an effective cure of syphilis infection. Untreated syphilis infections can last for many years and result in damage to the brain, nerves, eyes, heart, liver,

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bones, and joints, ultimately resulting in death. Infection with syphilis also increases the likelihood of HIV transmission and acquisition. It is critical that all sexual partners of an infected person be tested for infection, even if no signs of infection or illness are recognized.

Members of the public with questions or concerns about possible syphilis infection should contact their healthcare provider, or call DOH at 733-9281 on Oahu, 821-2741 on Kauai, 984-2129 on Maui, or 974-4247 on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Fact sheets regarding syphilis are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/STDFact-Syphilis.htm>. Additional information for the public and healthcare providers is available on the DOH website at <http://hawaii.gov/health/healthy-lifestyles/std-aids/index.html>

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