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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
Oct. 3, 2011

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### **Syphilis Cases Rise in Escambia County**

PENSACOLA – The Escambia County Health Department wants local physicians and the community at large to know that an outbreak of syphilis infections is occurring in Escambia County, Florida. So far this year, 69 cases of syphilis have been reported, a number equivalent to last year's total. Before this outbreak began, the county averaged 25 cases a year. Local health officials are consulting with Florida regional and state health officials to combat the increase of syphilis infections.

Syphilis is spread by intimate contact with an infected partner. Left untreated, it can lead to severe disease and even death. Studies indicate a 2 to 5 times increased risk for transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, in the presence of syphilis. Syphilis may also be transmitted from an infected pregnant woman to her baby. These infants are at risk of lifelong disabilities and death.

Individuals are encouraged to be aware of the signs and symptoms of syphilis. In the initial stage, a sore might be visible in the genital area or the mouth (usually painless). In the second stage, a rash on the palms of the hands or the soles of the feet, moist lesions in the mouth, and/or unexplained hair loss may develop. When sores and lesions are present, they are extremely infectious, and intimate contact with them should be avoided. Early syphilis can include periods of "latency" with no outward signs or symptoms. Individuals experiencing these symptoms, or who have experienced them in the past should see their physician or local clinic for testing and treatment.

The best way to prevent syphilis is not to have sex with an infected partner. Therefore, it is important to know your partner's syphilis status. Proper use of a latex condom can help protect against acquired HIV, syphilis and a number of other sexually transmitted diseases.

Syphilis can be detected through a simple blood test at a physician's office or clinic. Several local clinics provide free or low cost screening, diagnosis and treatment services. The Escambia County Health Department also provides these services.

In cooperation with the Florida Department of Health's Bureau of the STD Prevention and Control, the Escambia County Health Department is investigating the situation. A comprehensive syphilis education and outreach campaign has been developed and launches today. For more information on local low cost clinics or for the Escambia County Health Department's STD clinic hours and fees, visit [www.escambiahealth.com](http://www.escambiahealth.com) or call 850.595.6532.

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