

Cape May County leading N.J. in percentage growth of STDs

By **DEBORAH MCGUIRE**
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — According to statistics from the state Department of Health, Cape May County is leading New Jersey in a four-year rise in the number of reported cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) per capita.

The county showed an 84 percent increase, with a rise from 239 reported cases in 2012 to 442 cases in 2016. Statewide, STD cases rose 25 percent during that time period.

Jackie Cornell, principal deputy commissioner of the state Department of Health, said part of the statewide increase in STDs may be attributable to the popularity of online dating apps.

"There are some behavioral aspects contributing to rising numbers. Younger populations are becoming complacent with STDs, pos-

ing health risks and using online dating apps to more easily find sexual partners," Cornell said. "The CDC has noted there has been an increase in condom-less and anonymous sex through online dating apps, making finding a sex partner very easy."

In Cape May County, statistics are representative of an overall national rise. Reported cases of STDs have increased nationally over the past several years, Cape May County Department of Health Director of Nursing Natalie Sendler said.

"In 2016, the national rate for chlamydia was 497 cases per 100,000 people," Sendler said. "It's happening on a nationwide scale."

According to state Department of Health statistics, Cape May County had 322 cases of chlamydia in 2016, while 89 cases of gonorrhea were reported. There were no reported

cases of syphilis.

While Cape May County led the state in an overall percentage increase in STDs, it did not lead the state in overall reported cases. In 2016, Essex County reported 5,761 cases of chlamydia, 1,765 cases of gonorrhea and 215 cases of early latent syphilis.

Middle Township led the county in reported STDs with 88 cases of chlamydia and 29 cases of gonorrhea in 2016. Lower Township reported 85 cases of chlamydia and 20 cases of gonorrhea. There were no reports of STDs from Cape May and West Cape May. Upper Township reported 37 cases of chlamydia and no cases of gonorrhea. Ocean City reported 17 cases of chlamydia and no cases of gonorrhea.

Of note, the six counties with the highest reported STD rates are Bergen, Camden, Essex, Hudson, Passaic

and Union. These six counties account for more than half of all reported disease and for nearly 70 percent of all syphilis reports, according to the state Department of Health office of communications.

On a national level, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2016 a total of 1.6 million cases of chlamydia were reported to the CDC, making it the most common notifiable condition in the United States. This case count corresponds to a rate of 497.3 cases per 100,000 population, an increase of 4.7 percent compared with the rate in 2015. During 2015-16, rates of reported chlamydia increased in all regions of the United States.

"New Jersey STD rates remain below the national average," Cornell said. "The CDC points out that the overall rates for

chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis have been rising over the past few years and pregnant women are experiencing some of the harshest outcomes from untreated STDs with congenital syphilis."

While the number of STDs may be increasing due to online dating apps or failure to practice safe sex, state and local officials said the increase in numbers of reported cases can be attributed to more intensive screening.

"More and more people are being tested," Sendler said. "If you're seeing an increase in numbers, then that means there's an increase in testing."

The impact of the climb in the number of STDs can be catastrophic for those infected. Left untreated, STDs can lead to infertility, cancer, congenital defects in infants and an increased risk of acquiring HIV.

Sendler said the Cape May County Department of Health's Family Planning and STD Services works hard to encourage both screening and safe-sex practices.

"The No. 1 deterrent in the prevention of STDs is abstinence," Sendler said. "The No. 2 deterrent is condom use."

"Get screened. If you're seeing multiple partners or if you think your partner is, then get screened. Our STD testing is free and confidential and the Department of Health offers condoms at no charge."

Testing is available in the department's walk-in clinic from 1 to 5:30 p.m. Tuesdays and from 9 a.m. to noon Thursdays. The county Department of Health also offers outreach programs to local organizations and schools. For more information about scheduling a program, call (609) 465-1187.

House hopefuls discuss widening divide

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izing. It hurts the country in a way. People need to speak together and understand each other. A leader's job is to try and bring people together."

Grossman said there's also a split in the Democratic Party, with progressive Democrats opposed to Van

Drew's voting record as a "conservative Democrat."

According to Grossman, Van Drew is "on probation with the base of his party, which believes all that crap" about political correctness.

"He can't do what I can do. He has to pretend he believes it, too. I have problems in my campaign.

Whatever problems I have are very miniscule compared to the problems Van Drew has," Grossman said.

Progressive Democrats insist Van Drew is a DINO (Democrat In Name Only) and criticize his opposition to gun control, same-sex marriage and raising the minimum wage. His Democratic critics also

point to Van Drew's support for a natural gas pipeline through the Pinelands and sponsorship of a bill to bring back the death penalty.

But Van Drew shrugged off the criticism of a divided Democratic base, noting his own support for what he called "progressive bills": equal pay for women and reforming the correction system with bail reform.

Van Drew said his constituent services help people throughout the First Legislative District.

"Numerous times we have saved people's lives. We have a team that works harder, that does more, and we're going to do it in Congress as well," Van Drew said, noting his constituent services helped people get medical treatment, reduced accidents by removing traffic lights on the Garden State Parkway and helped workers whose jobs were threatened with plant closings.

"Sometimes people get in politics and get to be big shots that they just forget about the average struggling individual that you try to help," Van Drew said.

A lot of ground to cover

The Second Congressional District is the largest in New Jersey geographically. Encompassing the shore, from Cape May and Atlantic counties, to the farmlands of Cumberland and Salem counties, to the southern tips of Gloucester, Camden, Burlington and Ocean counties, the district is home to seaside resorts, rural communities and sleepy bedroom towns. It is also the center of agricultural, tourism, fishing

and aeronautic industries.

Grossman said the district's growing economy is an issue he's encountered on the campaign trail. He credited President Donald Trump with New Jersey's economic gains and not the state's Democratic representatives.

"I think most voters are rightfully giving credit to the Trump national economy, which is benefiting people in the district in spite of what the Democrats are doing in Trenton," Grossman said.

During his campaign stops, Van Drew said, he has heard voters are concerned about taxes and the cost of living in New Jersey.

"I think we have to be so careful on moving forward with our budgets in New Jersey. As many people have said, it isn't always a revenue problem that we have; it's a spending problem," Van Drew said.

He added that voters are troubled by a lack of opportunity in southern New Jersey. Congress should work on increasing opportunities for those who live here, Van Drew said.

Grossman said local Republican clubs invited him to address their groups. While Grossman said he's receiving "very generous financial support" from Atlantic County Republicans, he's reaching out to other GOP organizations throughout the district.

"My job is to persuade Republican leaders in Cape May, Cumberland, Ocean, Salem and Gloucester what Atlantic County leaders already know," Grossman said.

"Cape May County is more complicated because Jeff Van Drew is from Cape May County and you have some feeling that some local leaders are afraid to openly go too much against Jeff Van Drew because he can retaliate against them as a state senator. With the Democrats controlling the legislative team, that's putting them on the spot."

Grossman is no stranger to controversy during this campaign. Shortly after he won the Republican nomination in June, a video of Grossman at a candidate's forum in April was released by American Bridge 21st Century PAC, a progressive Democratic Super PAC. In the video, Grossman

responded to Indian-American candidate Hirsh Singh's statement about diversity in the Republican Party by saying: "the whole idea of diversity is a bunch of crap and un-American."

The video made Grossman a national figure as news outlets throughout the country covered the story.

In July, Media Matters published an article stating Grossman posted a link on his Facebook page Dec. 30, 2014, from American Renaissance, a white supremacist online publication.

The article describes the perceived racial differences between whites, blacks and Latinos by claiming "blacks are different by almost any measure to all other people."

"They cannot reason as well. They cannot communicate as well. They cannot control their impulses as well. They are a threat to all who cross their paths, black and non-black alike," according to the article.

The National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) withdrew its support from Grossman because of his posting the article.

Grossman said he didn't fully read the article before he posted it to his Facebook page.

"If the intended effect was to knock me out, it had the opposite effect," Grossman said of the negative coverage. "What it did was made me a national figure and opened up national fundraising opportunities for me. It really energized the Trump base in south Jersey, which carried the district less than two years ago."

Grossman said his Twitter following went from 279 to 2,300 in three weeks, and money is rolling in.

Grossman has raised \$87,842, of which \$25,908 was from small individual contributions of less than \$200 and \$52,544 in large individual contributions, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Grossman's campaign spent \$31,461 and has \$56,381 cash on hand.

By contrast, Van Drew has raised a total of \$1 million, of which \$33,749 is from small individual contributions less than \$200 and \$625,401 is from large individual contributors.

Van Drew's campaign spent \$368,488 and has \$674,517 cash on hand.

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