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STD Testing Now Can Be Done at Home

Kits can be ordered at iwantthekit.org.

By Bill McAllister
Bio

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Health officials say part of the reason for Alaska's extremely high rates of sexually transmitted diseases might be that not enough people get tested for them.

Now there's a way Alaskans can get tested for STDs in the privacy of their homes.

With some sexually transmitted diseases, such as chlamydia and gonorrhea, people who are infected might not have any symptoms and don't think about getting tested.

And with Alaska's size and logistical issues, there are other barriers to STD testing.

"In a remote village also the issue sometimes is confidentiality because people don't necessarily want to go to a clinic where they know

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everybody," said Connie Jessen of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium.

Through the consortium, STD testing is now easier than ever.

And it's free.

Any Alaskan can make a phone call or go on-line to order an easy-to-use STD kit for home testing.

"All they have to do is they use the Q-tip -- what's called a swab -- to collect a specimen and then they put it in a vial and that one gets put into one of those plastic bags -- bio-hazard plastic bags -- put in an envelope; contact form has to be filled out, and it gets sent back to Johns Hopkins. And on the contact form they just tell us how they want to be contacted, what is the best way to get ahold of them."

Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore started the 'I Want the Kit' program in 2004.

It's now being offered in Alaska through a federal grant from the Indian Health Service.

And Dr. Jay Butler, director of community health services for the consortium, says the need is great here to do something to bring down the rates of STD infection.

Alaska led the nation last year in chlamydia and had the second highest rate of gonorrhea.

"So the trend tends to be, the more rural states, the states that have more poverty, are the states with the higher rates of disease," Butler said.

The kits allow testing for chlamydia, gonorrhea and trichomonas, all of which can be treated with



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antibiotics.

"And that's really the good news. They're treatable. They're curable. There are a few exceptions with gonorrhea where we have problems with drug resistance. But generally these are a class of infection where we have the drugs to treat them. The problem is making the diagnosis."

"Hopefully, I mean, the end result that we would wish for is a reduction in STD infections in Alaska. So that's the ultimate goal," Jessen said. "But obviously we're just one little piece of that puzzle. But I think it's an important step forward."

Now it's up to Alaskans to make the most of it.

Kits can be ordered at iwantthekit.org.

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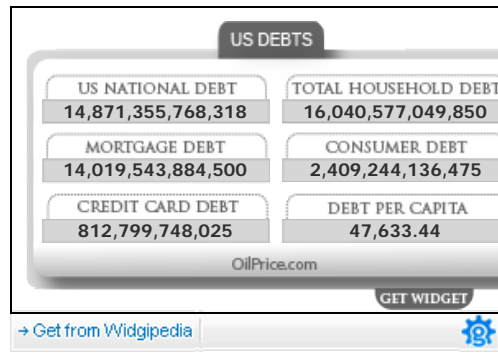
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