

'Severe epidemic' of sexually transmitted diseases sweeping the US, warn health experts in Valentine's Day announcement

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says 20 million new STD cases are diagnosed every year

John Hall

US health experts today revealed that an 'ongoing, severe epidemic' of sexually transmitted diseases is sweeping the country, with over **20 million new cases diagnosed every year**.

A study for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that over half the 20 million infections were contracted by people aged 15-24, a demographic that only makes up around a quarter of the US population. Catherine Lindsay Satterwhite, an epidemiologist for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told NBC News: "STIs take a big health and economic toll on men and women in the United States, especially our youth." She added that, because every sexually transmitted disease is preventable, "we know that preventing STIs could save the nation billions of dollars each year".

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study focussed on the eight most common sexually transmitted diseases in America: chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes, human papillomavirus, hepatitis B, HIV, and trichomoniasis.

Its principal focus was to establish how much sexually transmitted diseases cost the US taxpayer each year, and concluded that that figure was around \$16 billion.

Matthew Golden, the director of Public Health Seattle and King County HIV/STD Program and a professor of medicine at the University of Washington Center for AIDS and STD, said he believed the epidemic was being driven by two infections: chlamydia and human papillomavirus, known as HPV.

Both diseases are easily preventable, with Mr Golden saying America had "snatched defeat from the jaws of victory" by not pursuing strategies that have proven to be effective, such as school-based access to the HPV vaccine. Golden said: ""How could we possibly have done this to ourselves?...We have a solution; we have to make it happen." The HPV vaccine is seen as a highly effective tool in the fight against a disease that can lead to cervical, oral, anal, and penile cancers, and cause genital warts.

In most cases the human immune system clears the HPV virus out of the body naturally, but a percentage of those diagnosed every year go on to develop serious complications.

Chlamydia is a bacterial infection that can be easily and effectively treated once diagnosed. Many of those carrying the disease go undiagnosed however, as it often comes with no symptoms and there is no routine screening process in place.

If left untreated, chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, and ectopic pregnancies.