

## **Sex diseases among young rise by 50% in ten years: Cases of gonorrhoea soar amid fears new super-strain cannot be easily treated with antibiotics**

- **Under-25s diagnosed with STIs increased by five per cent since last year**
- **Number of sexually transmitted infections 46 per cent higher than 2003**
- **Under 25s have two-third of chlamydia cases and over half of gonorrhoea**

By Sophie Borland

The number of under-25s being diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases has climbed almost 50 per cent in ten years.

Experts are particularly concerned about the rise of gonorrhoea with rates increasing by a fifth in the past 12 months. They believe the trend is due to a new super-strain of the disease which cannot easily be treated with antibiotics.

Carefree youth: Under-25s diagnosed with STIs increased by five per cent since last year and the age group have two-third of chlamydia and over half of gonorrhoea cases (file photo)

A report by Public Health England shows there were 448,422 new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in 2012, including chlamydia, herpes and genital warts.

The total is up by 5 per cent on the previous year and 46 per cent higher than 2003, when figures were first collected.

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Experts say the rise is due to teenagers and adults in their early 20s having unprotected sex. But Labour said the figures show a sharp increase in the past three years which they blamed on the Government's sex education policy.

The party accused ministers of teaching youngsters 'too little too late' and said they were not doing enough to improve testing and treatment clinics.

Rates are highest among the under-25s and nearly two-third of chlamydia cases and more than half of gonorrhoea infections occurring in this age group.

The Public Health England report states: 'The continuing high STI rates in England suggest too many people are still putting themselves at risk through unsafe sex, especially young adults and men who have sex with men.' It urges the under-25s to ensure they use protection with 'casual partners' and have regular checks at sexual health clinics. Audrey Simpson, of the Family Planning Association, said there was less awareness of the importance of contraception among the young, adding: 'The worry is that condom use is not being taught in schools. There may be less awareness in people's conscience.'

Gonorrhoea cases rose from 21,024 to 25,525, up 21 per cent, last year. The report adds: 'High gonorrhoea transmission rates are concerning as the global threat of antibiotic resistance grows. Ensuring treatment-resistant strains of gonorrhoea do not persist and spread remains a public health priority.' Scientists have previously warned of a super-strain of the illness which could spread very quickly unless better treatments are developed.

A Department of Health spokesman said: 'The increase in reported STIs over recent years is in part due to better testing, especially for chlamydia and gonorrhoea, and we have also seen improvements in other areas like teenage pregnancy where rates are at their lowest levels since records began. Our approach to tackling sexual health is working... Sex and relationship education is already compulsory in maintained secondary schools, and primary schools are able to decide whether they too want to teach it.'