

## PRESS RELEASE

# Concerns about future treatment of gonorrhoea in Europe: ECDC issues its response plan.

Stockholm, 11 June 2012

**With more than 32 000 cases, gonorrhoea was the second most commonly reported sexually transmitted infection (STI) in Europe in 2010<sup>1</sup>. As data from the ECDC report *Gonococcal antimicrobial susceptibility surveillance in Europe 2010* illustrates, gonococci have become more resistant to common agents for treatment and show reduced susceptibility to newer antibiotics. “This indicates the risk that gonorrhoea may become an untreatable disease in the near future”, stresses ECDC Director Marc Sprenger. In response to these signals, ECDC today also publishes its *Response plan to control and manage the threat of multidrug-resistant gonorrhoea in Europe*.**

Results from the European Gonococcal Antimicrobial Surveillance Programme (Euro-GASP)<sup>2</sup> show that the percentage of isolates with decreased susceptibility to the recommended drug for treatment of gonorrhoea (cefixime) rose from 4% in 2009 to 9% in 2010. Decreased susceptibility was detected in 17 countries in 2010, seven more than in the previous year.

“Decreasing susceptibility to recommended antimicrobials and increasing numbers of treatment failures across Europe ask for careful monitoring of the European gonococcal population as the loss of the current recommended treatments could result in untreatable gonorrhoea”, says ECDC Director Marc Sprenger. “Only continued surveillance of antimicrobial resistance in gonococci will inform existing and future treatment guidelines adequately in order to ensure that patients are treated with effective drugs and morbidity is reduced in infected patients.” To this effect, the Euro-GASP includes testing of isolates on antimicrobial resistance twice a year, an external quality assessment programme, and training for laboratory staff.

The ECDC response plan aims to support EU Member States in their national efforts in the control of gonorrhoea and provides a framework for multidisciplinary interventions by outlining recommendations and possible strategies to control the threat of multidrug-resistant gonorrhoea across Europe.

“Public health experts and clinicians need to be aware of the current critical situation and should be vigilant for treatment failures”, Sprenger adds. “The findings of the ECDC reports also imply that the European gonorrhoea treatment guidelines need to be reviewed”.

The ECDC surveillance report *Sexually transmitted infections in Europe 1990-2010*, also published today, covers data and trends on the five STI under surveillance in the of the European Union and European Economic Area (EU/EEA): syphilis, congenital syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia and lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV). The report identifies diverging trends in sexually transmitted diseases across Europe suggesting a rapidly increasing trend for chlamydia and slightly decreasing trends for gonorrhoea and syphilis. Chlamydia is the most frequently reported STI accounting for 345 421 notified cases in 2010.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### CHLAMYDIA

Genital chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the *Chlamydia trachomatis* bacterium which can irreversibly damage a woman's reproductive organs. Although chlamydia is easily treated with antibiotics, many infections remain undiagnosed because of the large proportion of asymptomatic patients (70% of women and 50% of men). In the absence of opportunistic testing or regular screening, persons with asymptomatic chlamydia are likely to continue to transmit the infection to new sexual partners. Control of genital chlamydia focuses on reducing sexual risk behaviour, condom use, early diagnosis, and effective management of sexual partners in order to break the chain of transmission.

### GONORRHOEA

Gonorrhoea is a STI caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* bacteria. It can infect areas of the reproductive tract, including the cervix, uterus and egg canals in women as well as the urine canal (urethra) in both women and men. As the bacterium can also infect the mouth, throat, eyes and rectum, a broad spectrum of clinical presentations can occur. Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhoea which is spread through unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex. Untreated gonorrhoea infections can lead to stillbirths and infertility in men and women. Gonorrhoea also plays a role in facilitating HIV transmission.

### SYPHILIS

Syphilis is a STI caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. Transmission occurs from person to person primarily during vaginal, anal or oral sex. It can also be transmitted during pregnancy mother- to-child (congenital syphilis). The infection often does not cause any symptoms in its early stages but left untreated, it can progress to affect the entire body. Syphilis cannot be spread through contact with items or utensils like toilet seats, doorknobs or cutlery as direct contact with a syphilis sore is needed. Sores mainly occur in external genitals, vagina, anus or in the rectum.

### LYMPHOGRANULOMA VENEREUM (LGV)

LGV is a systemic STI caused by a specific type of *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Visual signs of the infection include genital papule(s) and/or ulcers and swelling of the lymph glands in the genital area. LGV may also produce rectal ulcers, bleeding, pain and discharge. Transmission occurs from person to person through direct contact with ulcers, lesions or other infected areas.

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**[Find the reports on the ECDC website from 11 June:](#)**

The full [ECDC surveillance report \*Sexually transmitted infections in Europe 1990-2010\*](#)

The full [ECDC surveillance report \*Gonococcal antimicrobial susceptibility surveillance in Europe 2010\*](#)

The ECDC [Response plan to control and manage the threat of multidrug-resistant gonorrhoea in Europe](#)

More on the [ECDC Programme on HIV, STI and blood-borne viruses](#)

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The [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\)](#) is an EU agency tasked with identifying assessing and communicating threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. It supports the work of public health authorities in the EU and EEA/EFTA Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> ECDC, *Sexually transmitted infections in Europe 1990–2010*

<sup>2</sup> ECDC, *Gonococcal antimicrobial susceptibility surveillance in Europe 2010*