



# County of Malheur

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT

1108 S.W. 4th Street • Ontario, OR 97914 • (541) 889-7279

March 2, 2021  
For Immediate Release

### **Sexually transmitted infections show increase in Malheur County**

If COVID-19 cases were factored out of Malheur County's communicable disease assessment for 2020, sexually transmitted infections would take the lead in number of cases throughout the county. Out of 405 non-COVID communicable diseases reported in 2020, 315 (78%) were STIs.

The [2020 Communicable Diseases in Malheur County report](#) encompasses data from health care providers throughout the county and offers a detailed look at disease counts, 5-year trends, and demographics. It was prepared by epidemiologist Daniel Morris, MS, PhD.

The report concludes that STIs, including chlamydia, gonorrhea and HIV, are on the rise locally. Chlamydia was the most common infection, but gonorrhea was the fastest growing, with four times the number of cases in 2020 (91) than in 2019 (23). There were 5 cases of HIV reported in 2020, compared to none in 2019. Syphilis showed a slight decline, with 5 cases reported in 2020 compared to 6 cases in 2019.

“Those numbers are significant, especially when you consider that COVID-19 more than likely resulted in fewer people being tested for STIs in 2020 than in previous years,” Malheur County Health Department Director Sarah Poe said.

Testing for STIs is one way to help control their spread, according to MCHD Communicable Disease Coordinator Angie Gerrard, RN. “Everyone should be tested for HIV at least once in their lifetime, and if there is more than one partner or new partners, we recommend being tested regularly. And, if someone tests positive for one STI, we recommend getting tested for others, since they are transmitted the same way.”

If tests for chlamydia or gonorrhea are positive, patients should ask their provider to write a prescription for themselves as well as their partner so that the infection is not passed back and forth untreated. “We encourage people to contact the Malheur County Health Department if they need help with that,” Gerrard said.

The report shows that:

- In Malheur County's population centers, rates were highest in Ontario and lowest in Vale.

*The Malheur County Health Department does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, religion, gender identity, political beliefs or source of income. Interpreter services and/or other assistive aids are provided at our facility at no cost. Our facility is accessible.*

- In 2018 and 2019, about two-thirds of the STI cases were among women. In 2020, only 56% of cases were among women, mainly because of a large increase in gonorrhea cases among men. Gonorrhea cases have been on the rise in the region and across the nation. The five HIV cases in 2020 were all in men, ages 18-36.
- From 2018 to 2020, people ages 18-25 accounted for a little more than half of all STI cases, and people ages 26-35 made up about 30% of cases.
- The number of people with more than one STI increased from 15 in 2019 to 51 in 2020. If a person has a positive test for a disease more than a month after a previous positive test, a new case is created. This jump in multiple cases could indicate reinfection, which can happen if a person's partner does not receive treatment.
- Reports of non-STI communicable disease were mostly down in 2020. These include diseases such as Hepatitis C, tuberculosis, campylobacter, lead poisoning, salmonella, E. coli, West Nile Virus, giardia, Lyme, listeria, and several others. Overall, reports of non-STI diseases dropped from 133 in 2019 to 90 in 2020, "though this may be a reflection of fewer people seeking health care because of COVID," the report states.

Predictably, COVID-19 overshadowed all other diseases in Malheur County in 2020. There were 3,008 reported cases – roughly 10% of the county population.