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Education, awareness crucial for preventing spread of STDs

■ Love, sex and dating can be dangerous, but education is the key to avoid transmitting STDs

By Arlene Juan
 for the Emerald

As Valentine's Day approaches, many people are looking forward to romantic evenings with their significant others. But while planning the perfect night, it's important to keep safe sex in mind.

Ray Agullana, a disease intervention specialist for the Lane County Public Health Department, said the spread of sexually transmitted diseases continues to increase.

"The main concern for college students is having unprotected sex when under the influence of alcohol or drugs," he said.

According to Agullana, the most common STD throughout the United States, including Oregon, is chlamydia. Like most STDs, chlamydia is transmitted person-to-person through oral, rectal or genital sex. It takes about two weeks after contracting the disease for symptoms to appear, Agullana said. Men infected with the bacteria may complain of a burning sensation upon urination, a mucous discharge from the penis and increased frequency of urination, he said.

"Women infected with the bacteria are more unfortunate because chlamydia may be present with no noticeable symptoms," Agullana said. "As many as 75 percent of women and 50 percent of men may be symptom-free."

According to state reports provided to the Center of Disease Control, teenage girls have the highest

rates of chlamydial infection. In these states, females between ages 15 and 19 represent 46 percent of people who have the disease and women age 20 to 24 represent another 33 percent.

Treatment for chlamydia is an oral antibiotic called Azithromycin, which is taken for seven to 10 days.

Gonorrhea and syphilis are the next most common STDs. Agullana said the rate of gonorrhea continues

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Ray Agullana
 disease intervention specialist

to increase, while the rate of syphilis is decreasing.

The CDC estimates that about 650,000 people will contract gonorrhea every year, according to its Web page on STDs, located at www.cdc.gov/std. Gonorrhea is caused by a bacterium that can multiply rapidly in the body's mucous membranes. CDC statistics indicate that approximately 75 percent of all reported cases of gonorrhea are found in persons between ages 15 and 29. The highest rates of infection are usually found in 15- to 19-year-old women and 20- to 24-year-old men.

Treatment for gonorrhea is a single-dose antibiotic called Cefixium. Agullana said the only complication with treating gonorrhea is if the

bacterium spreads to the throat. In this case, infected persons are treated by injection.

Syphilis is passed from person to person through direct contact with a syphilis sore. Pregnant women with the disease can pass it on to the baby they are carrying.

"The late stage of syphilis is life-threatening, but there are currently no cases in Lane County," Agullana said.

Treatment for syphilis varies depending on the stage of the disease.

Health professionals such as Agullana emphasize the use of protection. The University Health Center, Lane County Public Health and other health clinics in the Eugene/Springfield area offer various types of contraceptives against STDs, such as condoms, dental dams and oral contraceptives. To increase prevention of STDs, Agullana advises limiting the number of sex partners or practicing abstinence and getting a check-up every six months if sexually active.

"There are a lot of protection methods when it comes to sex," Agullana said. "It just becomes a matter of practicing safe sex."

Sophomore Ana Haase-Reed believes she is well-informed about STDs.

"I'm not personally aware of STD resources on campus," she said, "but I have heard that the health center offers good programs."

Senior Joseph Nash thinks he has learned more about STDs since sex education in high school.

"There are plenty of opportunities to learn about STDs almost everywhere," he said.

Arlene Juan is a freelance reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Campus Responses to Aftermath of September 11 Events

Department of Geography
 presents
September 11th and the Changing Geopolitical Context
 with Alexander Murphy and Shaul Cohen
Wednesday, February 6 4:00-5:30
100 Willamette Hall

In an effort to facilitate education and informed discussion—from a variety of perspectives—on the events of September 11th and their aftermath, the University of Oregon Senate Ad-Hoc Committee charged with coordinating the university's response is sponsoring a series of panel presentations and discussions during Winter term 2002.

Symposia will meet weekly, on Wednesdays from 4:00 to 5:30 P.M., in 100 Willamette Hall. Each week will feature presentations and discussions that draw on the particular perspectives, specializations and expertise of University of Oregon schools, departments and programs, as well as individual faculty engaged in teaching and research on topics that inform our understanding of the September 11th crisis and subsequent developments.

The University Senate Ad-Hoc Committee does not take positions on issues of policy, politics, or ideology. To ensure its neutrality, the Committee will provide clear identification of the specific sponsorship of campus activities by the groups that carry them out. In all cases, the content of remarks and materials relating to these issues are the responsibility of their sponsors, and do not reflect an official position of the Ad-Hoc Committee or the University of Oregon.

All meetings are free of charge and open to the public.

To contact the Senate Ad Hoc Committee, e-mail sept11@darkwing.uoregon.edu or connect to the Committee's web page:
<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~sept11/>