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Health Department Highlights Health Impacts of Sexually Transmitted Diseases

April is STD Awareness Month

Spring is here and insects aren't the only thing we have to protect ourselves from. April is STD awareness month and the Anson County Health Department is encouraging everyone to stay safe and protected.

An STD is a sexually transmitted disease or infection. In most instances, STDs are passed from an infected person to another person during unprotected sexual activities. STDs remain a significant public health problem in the United States.

A free educational session on STDs will be provided on Thursday, April 25, from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Anson County Health Department. For more information contact Dinikia Savage at 704-994-3342.

The Anson County Health Department is located at 110 Ashe Street in Wadesboro.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates there are 20 million new infections that occur each year in the United States. Nearly half of that amount is among teenagers and young adults between the ages of 15 to 24. About 80% of sexually active people are infected with an STD at some point in their lives. The cost of STDs to the U.S. health care system is estimated to be as much as \$16 billion annually.

In the 2016 Anson County Community Health Assessment, conducted by the Health Department in partnership with Carolinas HealthCare System Anson, STDs were listed as one of the top three health issues in the county. Anson County has some of the highest STD rates in the state underscoring the need for prevention.

Health problems caused by STDs tend to be more severe and more frequent for women than for men, in part because for women there are often no visible symptoms. However, both men and women can contract a sexually transmitted infection at any time if they engage in unprotected sexual activities. STDs can affect your health and cause reproductive health problems, fetal problems, cancer, and lead to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

There are more than 35 infectious diseases that are spread primarily through sexual activity. Some of the most common STDs are human papilloma virus (HPV), chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes, trichomoniasis (Trich), hepatitis B, and HIV/AIDS.

Despite the news, there are effective ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat STDs. STD screening and early diagnoses are important in preventing transmission and the long-term health consequences of STDs. Abstaining from sex, reducing the number of sexual partners, and always and correctly using condoms are all effective prevention strategies. Safe and effective vaccines are also available to prevent hepatitis B and some types of HPV that cause disease and cancer.

The Anson County Health Department offers a comprehensive range of STD services, including testing and treatment. STD screening and prompt treatment (if infected) are critical to protect a person's health and prevent transmission to others. Testing at the health department is completely confidential and minors do not need parental consent to receive STDs services. The Anson County Health Department provides free STD testing for everyone.

The Health Department's hours are Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The walk-in hours for the STD clinic are Monday-Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. For more information on STDs, symptoms, or treatment, contact STD nurse Lori Burr at 704-994-3340.

Learn more on STDs and treatment at www.cdc.gov/std.

Tips for Better Tomatoes

With the last days of frost around the corner many people are getting ready to plant summer gardens and on the list of plants to grow tomatoes are usually at the top. Tomatoes are one of the most popular vegetables grown in North Carolina, but often times growers run into trouble with these garden favorites. However, there is hope for getting a bounty of tasty tomatoes without dealing with the frustrations of poor quality plants and fruit. Start this gardening season out with some of these tomato growing basics and set your garden up for success this year.

Start by selecting a site that receives at least 8 hours of direct sunlight during the day. Tomatoes will grow fine with less sunlight but flowering will be reduced which means less tomatoes to harvest. Also rotate your tomatoes every year to a different spot in the garden. If tomatoes are planted in the same spot every year disease issues can become a problem and severely affect the growth and performance of your plants.

Send off a soil sample if you haven't had your soil tested in the past two or three years. Tomatoes like a pH of 6.5 to 6.7. If lime needs to be applied it takes months to have an effect on the soil so start early. Soil tests also give you accurate information about nutrient levels in your soil and fertilizer recommendations for your crop. Don't over fertilize, over fertilization can lead to increased leaf and stem growth but lower fruit loads. If no soil test has been taken, apply 3/4 cup of lime and 1/2 cup of 8-8-8 fertilizer for each plant. Once the plants start to set fruit apply 2 to 3 ounces of 10-10-10 around each plant and then apply that amount again every 4 to 6 weeks until the end of the season. Keep the fertilizer 4 to 6 inches away from the base of the plant to prevent fertilizer burn.

Once you plant your tomatoes apply 2 to 3 inches of mulch around your plants. Ground up leaves or straw are a good option to mulch with in the garden. Mulch retains moisture in the soil, cuts down on weed pressure and prevents soil from splashing up on your plants in rain events and overhead irrigation applications. This reduces the chance of disease spreading to your plants and fruit.

When watering your tomatoes use a soaker hose or drip tape. Drip irrigation keeps the foliage and fruit on the plants dry, this also reduces disease and rot. Tomatoes need about 1 to 1 1/2 inches of water a week. Make sure your soil doesn't dry out or problems such as fruit cracking and blossom end rot can occur.

Last thing is make sure to trellis your tomatoes. This can be done in many different ways but some of the most popular methods are tomato cages or Florida weave. Trellising keeps your tomatoes off the ground which reduces rot and makes for easier picking.

There are many more tomato growing practices out there to give you the best crop possible but if you start with these basics you will be on your way to more productive tomato plants in your garden.

By Joseph Moore, Anson County Cooperative Extension

2019 NC Strawberry Season is Underway

April signals the start of strawberry season in North Carolina, and local growers are expecting a very good crop that should last through Memorial Day.

"There should be plenty of berries this year despite a wet and cold first quarter in 2019," said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. "We encourage consumers to visit a pick-your-own farm, go to a farmers market or stop by a roadside stand to get the freshest berries available."

Consumers also can find locally grown strawberries in grocery stores and restaurants by looking for the Got to Be NC logo. The Got to Be NC program is the official state identity program for N.C. agricultural products, and lets consumers know they are buying a product grown, raised, caught or made in North Carolina.

North Carolina is the fourth-largest producer of strawberries in the nation, with about 1,100 acres harvested across the state. Growers have already started picking in Eastern North Carolina. Piedmont growers will begin picking in mid-April and growers in the mountains should start by the first of May. The peak of the season is traditionally Mother's Day.

The department and the N.C. Strawberry Association will celebrate with two Strawberry Day events in May. The first event is at the State Farmers Market in Raleigh on May 2 and at the Robert G. Shaw Piedmont Triad Farmers Market in Colfax on May 3. Both celebrations includes a strawberry recipe contest, ice cream samples and a visit by Suzy Strawberry.

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Gateway to your future!

This is going to be a great day for you and your family! We are going to have career fair for those who are interested in finding a local career in Anson County. We will be showcasing all the local opportunities in both educational and careers available to residents of Anson County both young and old. There will be exhibits and activities for youth to see and do, so bring your family!

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