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# 2018 Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) in Wyandotte County

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# Executive Summary

## Abstract

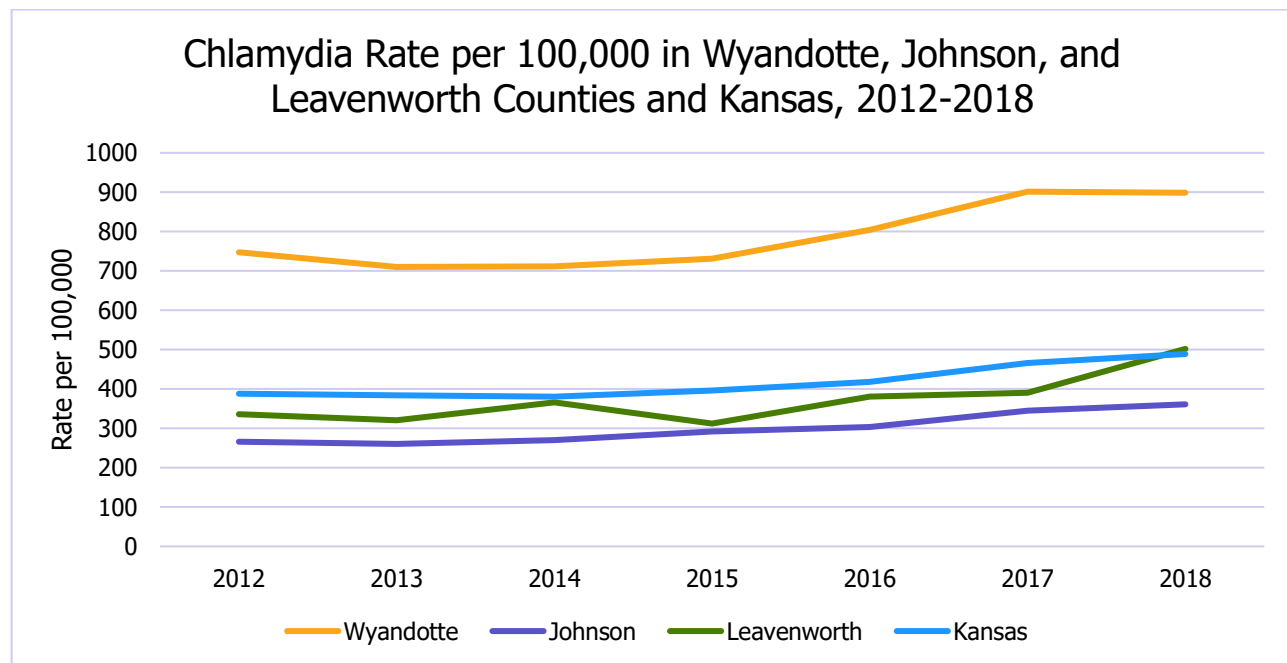
Wyandotte County, Kansas continues to see steep and sustained increases in chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. Sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates in Wyandotte County remain higher than the rest of the state and surrounding counties. These rising rates are a significant public health concern.

For more information, please contact the Unified Government Public Health Department's Chief Epidemiologist Elizabeth Groenweghe at [egroenweghe@wycokck.org](mailto:egroenweghe@wycokck.org)

# The Rise of STIs in Wyandotte County

Nationally, the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis have rapidly increased in the last decade, undermining years of progress towards eliminating these infections.<sup>1</sup> Infection rates across the country are at an all-time high and continue to rise. Wyandotte County, Kansas data shows the same alarming increases in STIs seen across the country. The newest available data reveals that Wyandotte County is disproportionately burdened by rapidly rising STI rates when compared to the state of Kansas and surrounding counties. State and county level data for this report was obtained from the Kansas Department of Health and the Environment's STI Statistics page.<sup>2</sup>

## Chlamydia



Rates of chlamydia in Wyandotte County remain disproportionately high. **Wyandotte County has the highest rate of chlamydia among the counties in Kansas at 898.4 per 100,000 in 2018.** This is compared to the total rate for the state of Kansas at 488.9.

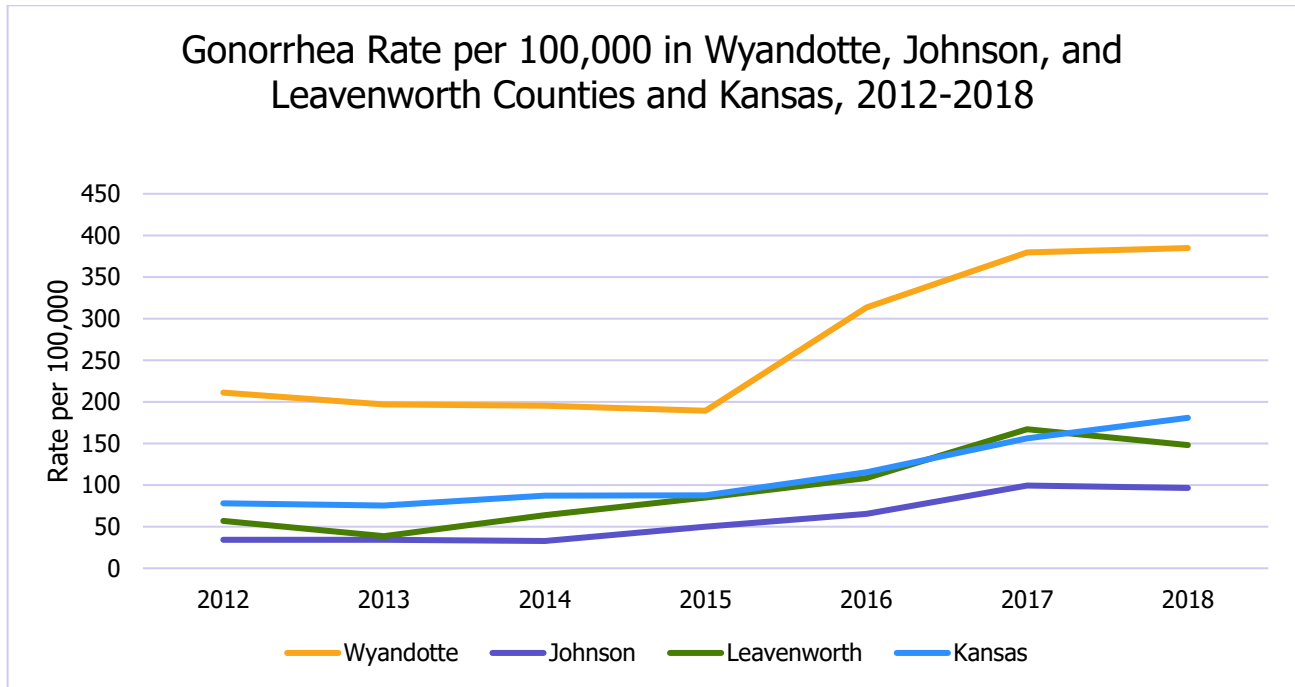
<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "New CDC Analysis Shows Steep and Sustained Increases in STDs in Recent Years", August 28, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/2018/2018-std-prevention-conference.html>

<sup>2</sup> Kansas Department of Health and the Environment, "KS STI Statistics", Accessed April 15, 2019. [http://www.kdheks.gov/sti\\_hiv/sti\\_reports.htm](http://www.kdheks.gov/sti_hiv/sti_reports.htm)

Surrounding counties also had substantially lower rates, including Johnson County at 361.0 and Leavenworth at 501.9.

Chlamydia is treatable; however, many cases go untreated because this infection frequently presents without any symptoms. In addition, Wyandotte County's higher rates of uninsured populations may lead to reluctance to get testing regularly. Left untreated, chlamydia can cause an infection called pelvic inflammatory disease and lead to infertility or pregnancy complications.<sup>3</sup>

## Gonorrhea



Wyandotte County has experienced a drastic increase in gonorrhea rates since 2015.

**Wyandotte County has the second highest rates of gonorrhea among all counties in Kansas. Wyandotte County's gonorrhea rate (384.8 per 100,000) was nearly four times as high as the county immediately to the south, Johnson County (96.6 per 100,000).**

Like chlamydia, gonorrhea is a treatable infection, but drug resistant strains of gonorrhea are increasing in the United States. Men often experience symptoms while females usually do not, highlighting the importance of regular testing. Untreated, gonorrhea can also lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and difficulty getting pregnant.<sup>4</sup>

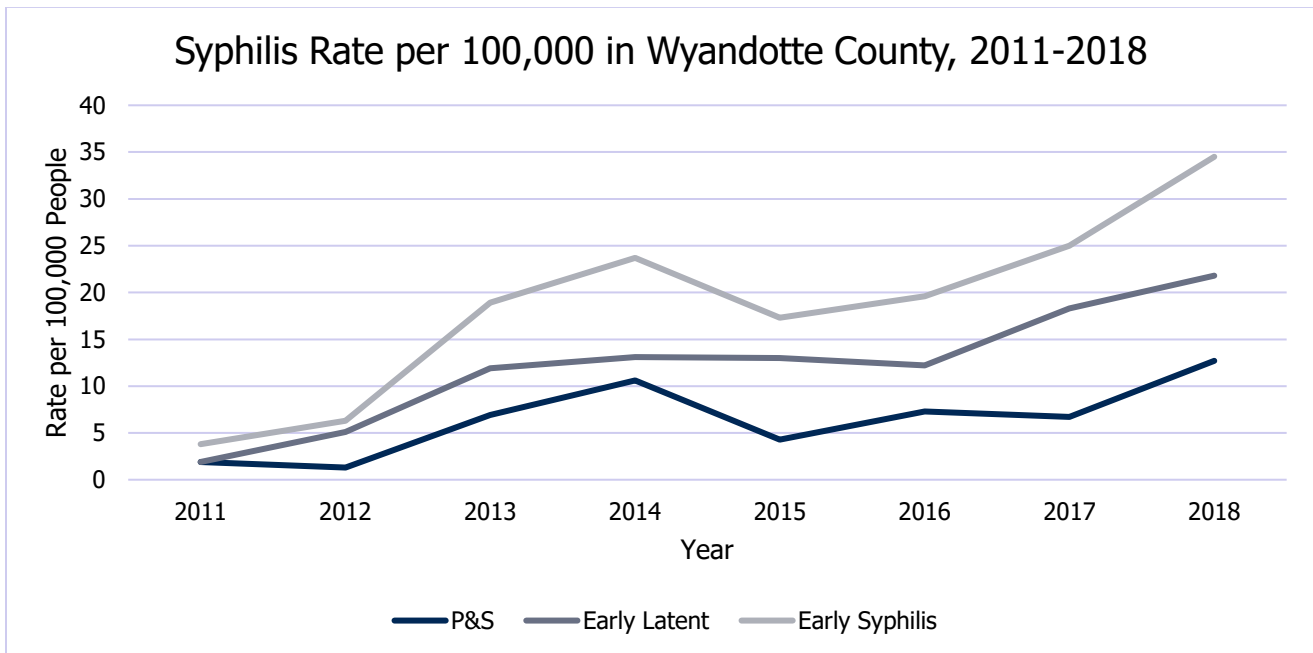
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<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Chlamydia CDC Fact Sheet", January 23, 2014.

<https://www.cdc.gov/std/chlamydia/stdfact-chlamydia.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Gonorrhea CDC Fact Sheet", January 29, 2014.

# Syphilis



\*P&S stands for primary and secondary cases of syphilis

Wyandotte County has also seen a large increase in syphilis between 2011 and 2018. The graph shows only early syphilis cases and further classifies these cases as primary and secondary cases versus early latent cases. Syphilis is divided into primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary stages with primary, secondary and early latent collectively known as early syphilis. Primary syphilis is defined by the sore that occurs at the original site of infection. Secondary syphilis has additional symptoms such as a rash and fever. The infection then moves into the latent stage with no symptoms at all.<sup>5</sup> Due to small numbers of cases, tertiary syphilis data is not publicly shared. **Remarkably, the rate per 100,000 of early syphilis in Wyandotte County has increased over 800% from 2011 to 2018.**

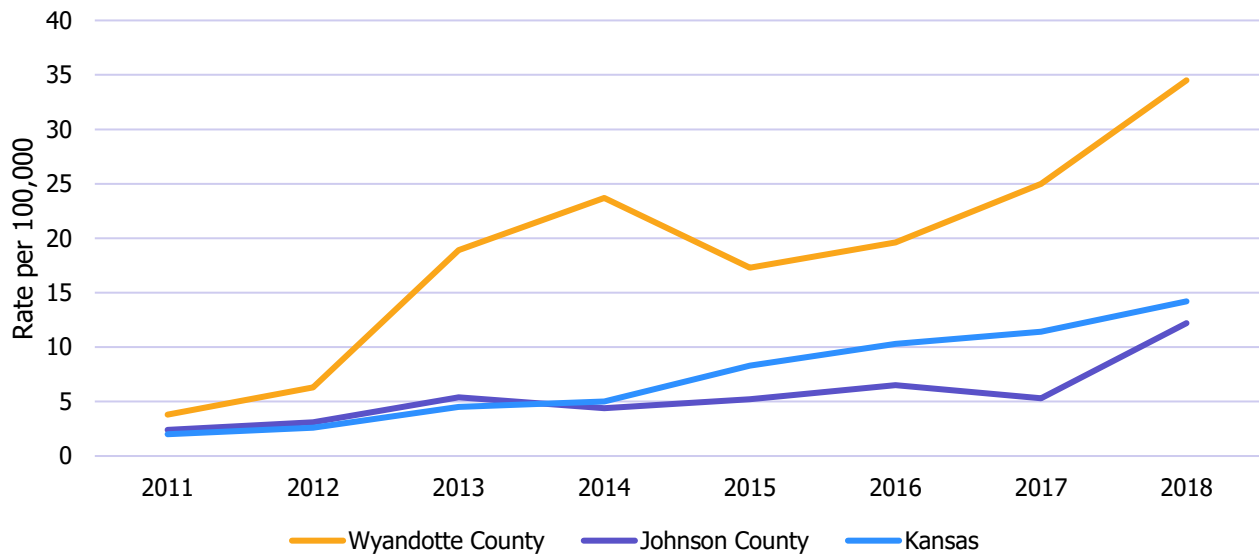
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<https://www.cdc.gov/std/gonorrhea/stdfact-gonorrhea.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Syphilis CDC Fact Sheet (Detailed)", January 30, 2017.

<https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-syphilis-detailed.htm>

Early Syphilis Rate per 100,000 in Wyandotte, Johnson, and Leavenworth Counties and Kansas, 2012-2018



Wyandotte County also demonstrated higher rates of syphilis in 2018 than other counties in Kansas. The rate per 100,000 for early syphilis was 21.8 per 100,000 for Wyandotte County versus 9.2 per 100,000 for Kansas—over two times as high. Compared to neighboring counties, Wyandotte County had the highest rates of syphilis as well. Wyandotte County also saw a much higher and more concerning increase in syphilis rates since 2011 than Kansas and neighboring counties. There was an 808% increase in early syphilis rates from 2011 to 2018. Overall in Kansas, the percent increase was 610%. The county directly south of Wyandotte County, Johnson County, had an increase of 408%, only half the increase seen in Wyandotte County.

**Syphilis is a treatable infection, but when left untreated, the infection can have serious complications for both men and women.** Initial symptoms of syphilis include a sore around the genital area, a skin rash, and fever, but signs and symptoms may be mild or easily missed. Syphilis then enters a latent period where there are no symptoms present. Some may develop a serious condition called tertiary syphilis which can have permanent complications and may affect a myriad of organ systems including the heart, brain, eyes, and nervous system. Untreated, syphilis can also have severe consequences for pregnant women and their babies. Pregnant women with syphilis are more likely to have a miscarriage or stillborn birth. Untreated, it may result in infant death in up to 40% of cases. In addition,

babies born may have a condition known as congenital syphilis, which leads to developmental delays, seizures or death.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

Wyandotte County, Kansas continues to see alarming rates of STIs. **The data reveals that STIs are increasing across the state of Kansas, but that Wyandotte County is seeing higher rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. Action is necessary to reduce STI rates and change the increasing trend over the last decade.** According to the National Association of County and City Health Officials' (NACCHO) "local health departments play a critical role in providing and/or assuring sexually transmitted infection prevention and treatment services by operating programs, providing services, and working with local healthcare providers and other community partners".<sup>7</sup> In addition, NACCHO recommends multiple levels of intervention, including implementing targeted disease investigation and interventions.

**Huge socioeconomic disparities exist in Wyandotte County that make treatment and control of STIs much more difficult than other surrounding counties in Kansas.** In 2017, 21.4% of Wyandotte County residents were at or below the poverty level, compared with only 5.6% in Johnson County,<sup>8</sup> and Wyandotte County had over twice the percent of uninsured residents compared to Johnson County (17% versus 6% respectively)<sup>8</sup>. Finally, Wyandotte County is experiencing a shortage of primary care physicians that can test and treat residents for STIs. For every one primary care physician, there are 2,550 residents in Wyandotte County. This is compared to 830 residents for every physician in Johnson County.<sup>9</sup> This disparity highlights the critical role local public health services plays in mitigating this STI crisis.

Local public health departments play a pivotal role in the prevention and control of STIs. Robust funding and evidence-based policies are essential for ensuring that local public health departments have the capacity to implement the numerous, multi-level interventions necessary to turn the tide.

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<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Syphilis CDC Fact Sheet (Detailed)", January 30, 2017.

<https://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/stdfact-syphilis-detailed.htm>

<sup>7</sup> National Association of County and City Health Officials, "Statement of Policy: Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections", September 2012. [https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Programs/Community-Health/09-10Prevention-and-Control-of-STI\\_-FINAL.pdf](https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Programs/Community-Health/09-10Prevention-and-Control-of-STI_-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Selected Economic Characteristics, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates". <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

<sup>9</sup> University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps 2019. [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)