

STI Fast Facts: Washington State 2020

In Washington (WA), sexually transmitted infections (STIs) were the most commonly reported communicable diseases preceding the COVID-19 outbreak. Excluding COVID-19, STIs comprised 81% of notifiable diseases or conditions reported to the WA State Department of Health in 2020.ⁱ Healthcare providers and laboratories are required to report confirmed cases of chlamydia (CT), gonorrhea (GC), syphilis, herpes, lymphogranuloma venereum, chancroid, and granuloma inguinale to their local health departments.

From 2019 to 2020, reported cases of CT and GC decreased, while reported cases of primary and secondary syphilis increased. 2020 data should be interpreted with caution due to COVID-19 pandemic impacts on STI testing, treatment, and case reporting. **Table 1** shows the number of STI cases reported in WA in 2019 and 2020.

Table 1: Reported STI Cases by Disease, Washington State, 2019 - 2020

Disease	2019	2020	Trend
Chlamydia (CT)	37,641	31,423	↓
Gonorrhea (GC)	11,848	11,580	↓
Primary & Secondary Syphilis	830	837	↑
Early Non-Primary Non-Secondary Syphilis	736	606	↓
Unknown Duration or Late Syphilis*	635	607	↓
Congenital Syphilis	17	10	↓
Genital Herpes, adult initial infection	1,739	1,375	↓
Neonatal Herpes	1	2	↑
Lymphogranuloma Venereum	2	0	↓
Chancroid	0	0	-
Granuloma Inguinale	0	0	-

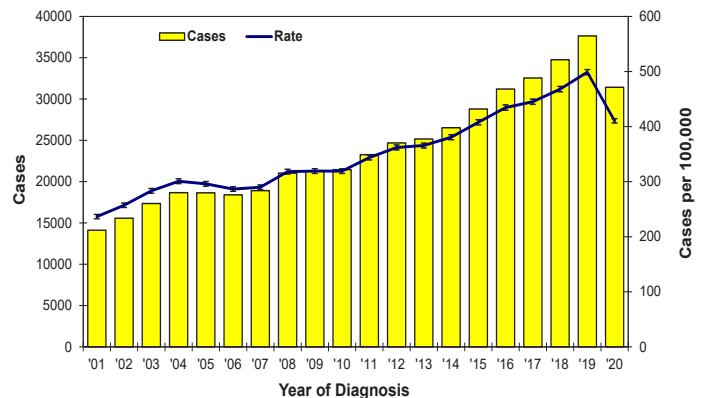
NOTE: Case counts in this table reflect reported cases only. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on access to medical care and reductions in routine screenings, it is currently unclear whether 2020 decreases are true decreases in infection.
*PHIMS-STD was updated in March 2020 to reflect CSTE's 2018 syphilis case definition. Cases previously classified as Late Latent are included in the Unknown Duration or Late Syphilis case count.

Chlamydia

Infection with the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis* (CT) is the most frequently reported STI statewide and nationally. While many people with CT experience minor discomfort and do not seek testing or treatment, untreated CT in women can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), infertility, ectopic pregnancy, and other reproductive health issues. Untreated CT may increase the likelihood of contracting or transmitting HIV and other STIs.

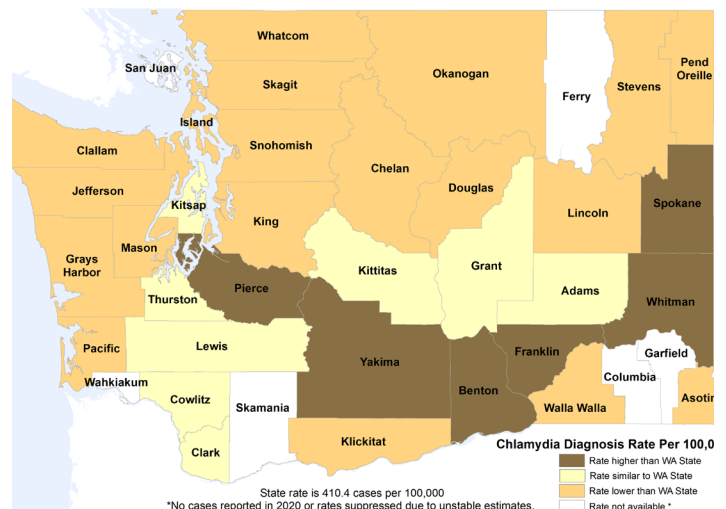
The number of chlamydia cases and incidence rate estimates among persons in WA State from 2001 to 2020 are presented in **Figure 1**. WA reported 410.4 cases of CT per 100,000 persons in 2020. Nationally, 481.3 cases of chlamydia were reported per 100,000 people in 2020.ⁱⁱ

Figure 1: Reported Chlamydia Cases and Rates, Washington State, 2001 - 2020



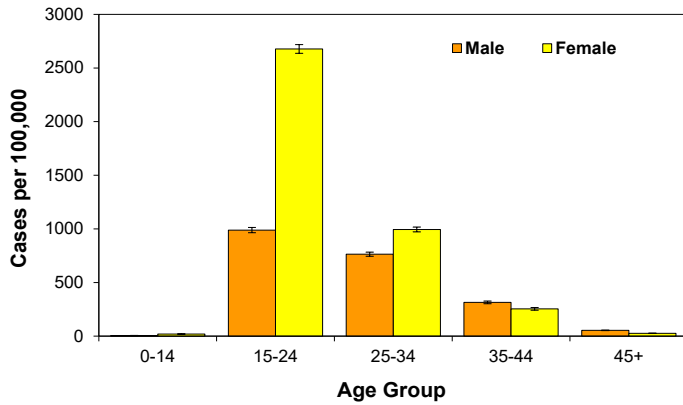
Chlamydia rates for 2020 are mapped by county in **Figure 2**. All counties, except for one (Garfield), reported one or more chlamydia cases in 2020.

Figure 2: Chlamydia Incidence Rate Estimates by County, Washington State Rate, 2020



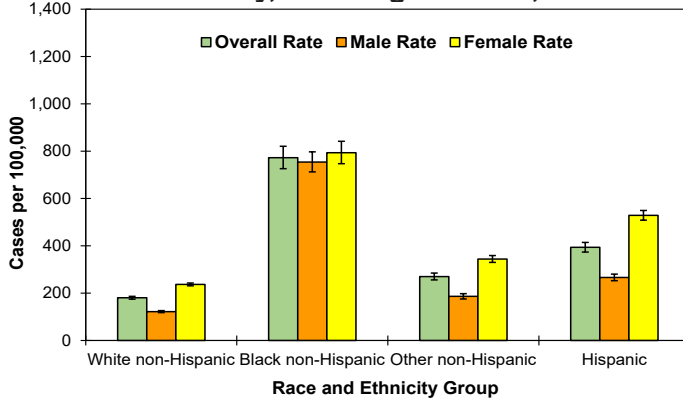
Statewide CT rates for 2020 are presented by gender and age group in **Figure 3**. Women 15 to 24 years of age have the highest rates of chlamydia, partially due to better detection and screening for CT among women of childbearing age. Transgender persons represented less than 1% of all chlamydia cases in 2020.

Figure 3: Chlamydia Rates by Gender and Age Group, Washington State, 2020



Rates by gender and race/ethnicity are presented in **Figure 4**.ⁱⁱⁱ In WA, rates of CT were lowest among white non-Hispanic persons and highest among black persons, specifically non-Hispanic black females. The overall rate of chlamydia for Hispanic persons was higher in Washington than nationally.ⁱⁱ

Figure 4: Chlamydia Rates by Gender and Race and Ethnicity, Washington State, 2020



Summary:

- Reported CT cases decreased by 17% in 2020.
- Chlamydia rates were highest among women, specifically those 15-24 years of age and black non-Hispanic women.
- 53% of CT cases reported in 2020 were under the age of 24 years.

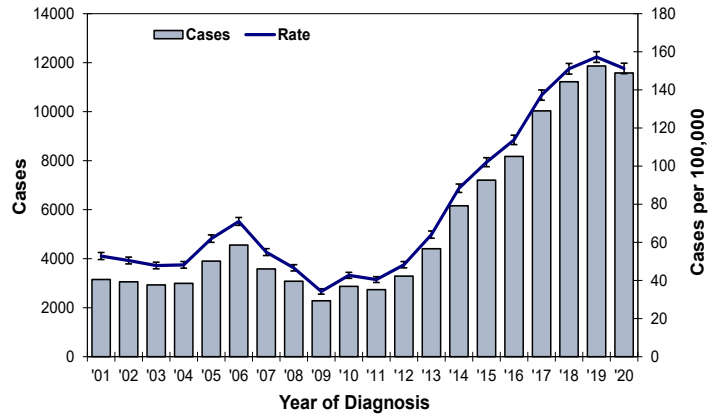
Gonorrhea

Infection with the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* (GC) is the second most commonly reported STI in the United States. Symptoms include abnormal genital discharge and painful urination. Some people do not notice any symptoms. Untreated GC may lead to PID or infertility, and the infection may spread to the joints or other parts of the body. Untreated GC may also increase the likelihood of

contracting or transmitting HIV and other STIs.

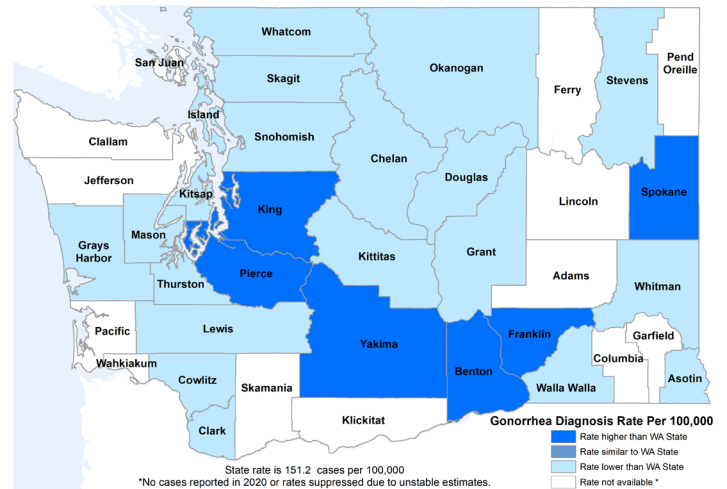
Statewide GC rates from 2001 to 2020 are presented in **Figure 5**. This is the first year the rate of gonorrhea in WA has decreased following consistent increases since 2012. In 2020, there were 151.2 cases of gonorrhea per 100,000 people.

Figure 5: Reported Gonorrhea Cases and Rates, Washington State, 2001-2020



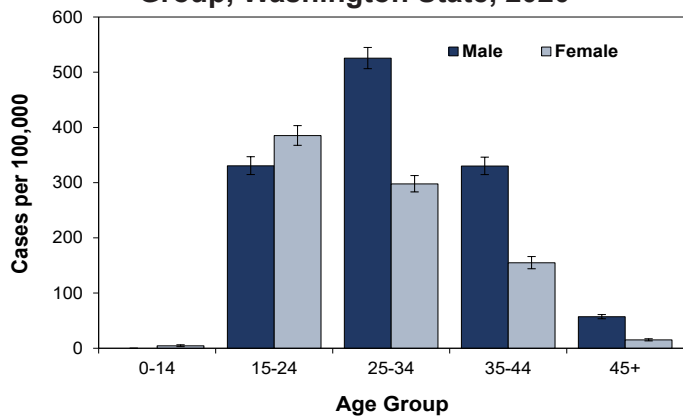
Gonorrhea rates for 2020 are mapped by county in **Figure 6**. All counties, except for three (Garfield, San Juan, and Wahkiakum) reported one or more gonorrhea cases in 2020.

Figure 6: Gonorrhea Incidence Rate Estimates by County Compared to the WA State Rate, 2020



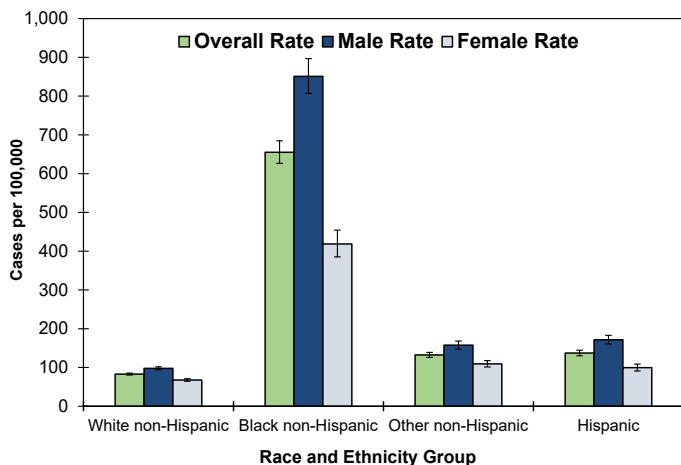
Gonorrhea cases by age and gender are shown in **Figure 7**. Rates were highest among males 25-34 years of age. Males have a higher rate of GC than females in most age groups, partly due to high rates among men who have sex with men (MSM). About 4% of men in Washington are MSM,^{iv} yet MSM represented 22% of male gonorrhea cases in 2020. Transgender persons represented less than 1% of all gonorrhea cases in 2020.

Figure 7: Gonorrhea Rates by Gender and Age Group, Washington State, 2020



Rates by gender and race/ethnicity are presented in **Figure 8**.ⁱⁱⁱ Gonorrhea rates in Washington were highest among black non-Hispanic males and lowest for white non-Hispanic females in 2020. Rates for Hispanic and white non-Hispanic persons were higher in Washington than nationally.ⁱⁱ

Figure 8: Gonorrhea Rates by Gender and Race and Ethnicity Group, Washington State, 2020



Summary:

- Reported GC cases decreased by 2% in 2020.
- Rates were highest in males aged 25-34 years.
- 37% of cases in 2020 were from King County.

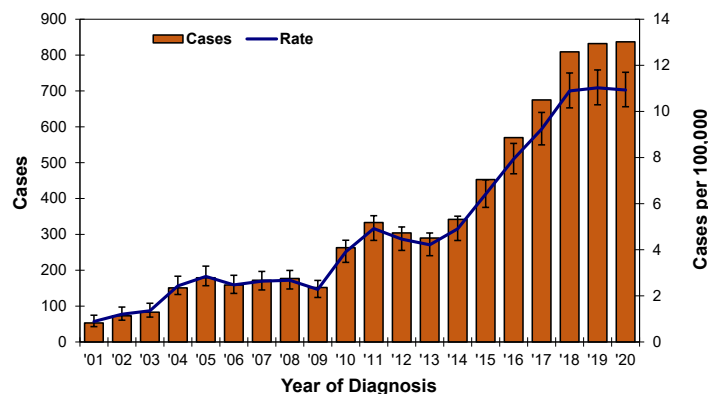
Syphilis

Syphilis is caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. Syphilis progresses through stages of primary, secondary, early non-primary non-secondary, and unknown duration or late. Primary and secondary (P&S) syphilis are the first stages of the disease during which persons are most contagious. P&S syphilis symptoms include painless lesions, rashes, and flu-like symptoms. Untreated syphilis can cause internal organ damage, de-

mentia, hearing loss, and blindness. Syphilis may increase the likelihood of contracting or transmitting HIV and other STIs.

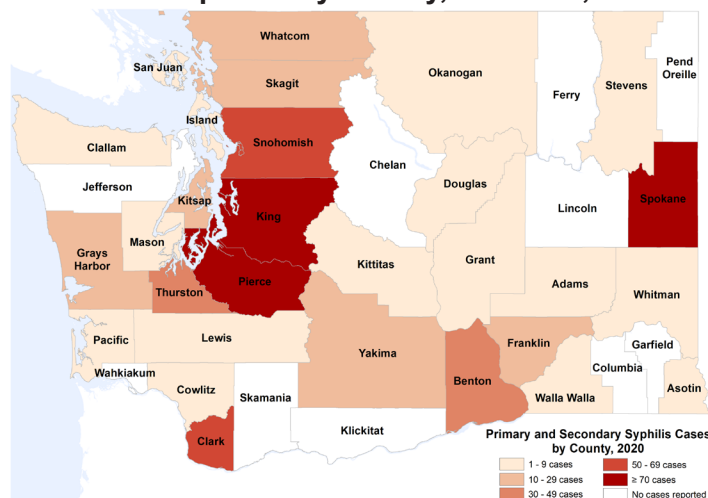
Annual rates of P&S syphilis from 2001 to 2020 are shown in **Figure 9**. The rate of P&S in Washington State slightly decreased for the first year since 2013. There were 10.9 cases of P&S syphilis reported per 100,000 people in WA State in 2020. Washington's 2020 P&S syphilis rate was slightly lower than the 2020 national P&S rate of 12.7 per 100,000 people.ⁱⁱ

Figure 9: Reported Primary and Secondary Syphilis Cases and Rates, WA State, 2001 - 2020



In 2020, 61% of P&S syphilis cases lived in Snohomish, King, and Pierce Counties (**Figure 10**). Spokane county residents accounted for almost 10% of cases.

Figure 10: Primary and Secondary Syphilis Cases Reported by County, WA State, 2020



Men had higher rates of P&S syphilis than women in 2020, with the highest rates by age and gender being among 25-34-year-old males (**Figure 11**). MSM represented 59% of male P&S syphilis cases. Less than 1% of all cases were among transgender persons.

Figure 11: Primary and Secondary Syphilis Rates by Gender and Age Group, Washington State, 2020

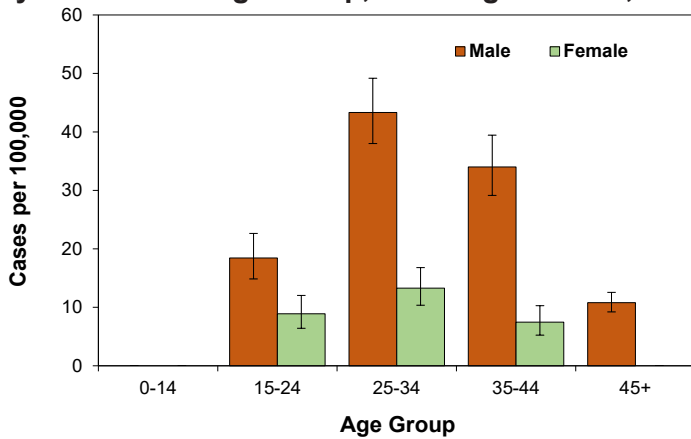
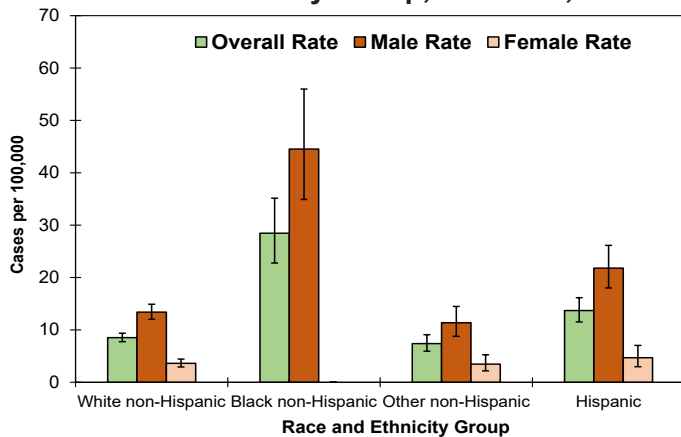


Figure 12 shows rates by race and ethnicity group and gender. Both overall and among males, rates of P&S syphilis were highest for black non-Hispanic persons and lowest for other non-Hispanic persons in 2020.ⁱⁱⁱ There were not enough cases to reliably produce a rate for black non-Hispanic females. Overall, the rate of P&S syphilis among white persons was higher in Washington than nationally.ⁱⁱ

Figure 12: P&S Syphilis Rates by Gender and Race and Ethnicity Group, WA State, 2020



Summary:

- Reported P&S syphilis case counts increased by less than 1% in 2020.
- 20% of P&S syphilis cases in 2020 were among people living with HIV.
- Cases among pregnancy-capable people increased by over a third from 2019 to 2020.

Special Focus: Impact of COVID-19

The first case of COVID-19 in Washington and the United States was confirmed on January 20, 2020. Governor Inslee declared a state of emergency in late February. By the end of 2020, WA averaged 2,326 new cases per day, and a total of 247,603

cases and 3,736 deaths were reported.^v

The pandemic and related shutdown were associated with social distancing, which could reduce the spread of STIs. However, preliminary studies also suggest COVID-19 caused a decline in STI testing and routine clinical services, which are especially important for catching asymptomatic cases. Therefore, it is important to interpret this 2020 data with caution, as it is not evident whether the declines in reported cases are true declines or related to gaps in surveillance and challenges in provision of care. With the pandemic persisting beyond 2020, further study will be needed to elucidate the impacts of COVID-19 on STI trends.

Notes

ⁱ 2020 STI counts include cases reported to PHIMS-STD between 01/01/2020 to 12/31/2020, in addition to CT cases reported to WELRS by CDC MMWR year (12/29/2019 to 1/02/2021). Other non-STI notifiable conditions are also reported by MMWR year.

ⁱⁱ National STD rate estimates: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/statistics/2020/default.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Other races' includes persons of non-Hispanic ethnicity reporting a race other than white or black, including multiple races and missing race. Other race, non-Hispanic estimates cannot be directly compared to national estimates.

^{iv} MSM population estimates: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4873305/>

^v COVID-19 data dashboard: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard>.

For More Information

Washington State Department of Health:
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/SexuallyTransmittedDisease>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention:
www.cdc.gov/std/

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