



**For Immediate Release:**

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## **Los Angeles County Launches In-Home STD Testing for Women Innovative Mail-In Test Kit Targets Rise in Rates of Gonorrhea, Chlamydia in Young Women of Color**

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is launching an innovative program to detect and treat chlamydia and gonorrhea among young women through a free STD Home Test Kit. This first-in-the-nation large scale program features a website where young women can order the kits, find out their results, and get information and, if necessary, referrals for treatment. This is the first time that an important STD screening and diagnosis program has been fully implemented online.

"In today's economy, when the public rightly expects us to tighten our belts and do more with less, our Department of Public Health deserves a lot of credit for thinking outside the box in its efforts to modernize our health care delivery system," said Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky. "As the second largest health jurisdiction in the nation, we should set an example of utilizing innovative and cost-effective approaches like this one in tough times, where the County and its departments still must ensure that we safeguard the public's health."

"The availability of a Home Test Kit, combined with the ease of ordering the kit and getting results online or by phone, represents an unprecedented opportunity to significantly reduce the numbers of young women affected by chlamydia and gonorrhea," said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. "There is no longer any reason for any young women in Los Angeles County to become infertile, suffer chronic pain, or deal with a life-threatening tubal pregnancy because of these two STDs."

The *Don't Think Know* Home Test Kit is specifically designed for women 25 years of age and younger. Young women can order The Kit online and take the test in private, on their own terms. Test kits will be mailed shortly after an order is received; testing is done by the Public Health Laboratory, and results will be available online or by phone one week later. A text message will also be sent, reminding recipients that results are available online.

"Direct messaging and low-cost, familiar tools, such as the internet and text messaging, remove cost, transportation, time, and other inconvenient barriers that prevent young women from safeguarding their sexual health," said Peter Kerndt, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health's STD Program. "More importantly, we're able to disseminate critical sexual health education and information in a way that connects with young people where they are – online."

Chlamydia infections have been steadily on the rise since 1996. They account for three out of every four STDs reported in Los Angeles County, and the majority of those infected (63%) are

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young women between the ages of 15 and 24. In 2008, there were 43,431 cases of chlamydia reported in men and women in Los Angeles County, and, in 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ranked Los Angeles County first among counties and independent cities in the U.S. for its high number of cases. Hispanics and African Americans account for 64% of cases reported in 2008. Chlamydia often has no signs or symptoms, and, left untreated, can have extremely negative consequences, including infertility.

In 2008, a total of 8,415 gonorrhea cases were reported, a 12% drop from 2007. It is still too early to determine if this decline will continue. The disparity across racial/ethnic groups continues to exist. Like chlamydia, gonorrhea has no or few signs or symptoms, and can cause long-term health affects such as pelvic inflammatory disease, and damage to reproductive organs leading to ectopic pregnancies or infertility.

The *Don't Think Know* Home Test Kit can be ordered through the program's website at <http://www.dontthinkknow.org/> or through the STD telephone hotline at 1-800-758-0880. English and Spanish speaking health educators are available at the hotline number Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Health educators can provide information about STD risk factors, symptoms, treatment options, and where to find medical care throughout LA County.

The Kit will be advertised through an expansive social marketing campaign, which will include outdoor advertising on buses and billboards, post card placements in beauty salons, and cable television, movie theater, and online advertisements. The "I Know Street Team" is another crucial part of the campaign, promoting the Home Test Kit on a grass roots level. The street team is composed of youth who take part in Planned Parenthood Los Angeles' Ujima Teen Program. This program provides reproductive health information and promotes responsible decision making to teens in South Los Angeles. The street team is supported by the California Family Health Council, which has been an instrumental partner in the "I Know" campaign. Public Health has also been working with Fraser Communications to develop and implement this important social marketing campaign.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>.

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