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D.C. health officials urge more syphilis testing for gays

By [JOE CREA](#)

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As syphilis infections continue to rise in the Washington, D.C. area, the Department of Health is collaborating with other health organizations to encourage more residents to get tested for the disease. According to figures from Whitman-Walker Clinic, between 2001 and 2002, new syphilis cases diagnosed at Whitman-Walker nearly doubled, from 28 to 55. From January to July of 2003, Whitman-Walker diagnosed 38 new cases of syphilis, indicating that this year's figures will be higher once again. Dr. Karyn Berry, chief of the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at the D.C. Department of Health said that the department is collaborating with Whitman-Walker and both the Virginia and Maryland Health Departments on various outreach activities. Berry said the D.C. department plans to make the syphilis test more available to D.C. residents. "This is a very treatable disease and we need to get people in for tests since syphilis sores can be a gateway to other things like HIV infections," Berry said. According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, national syphilis rates rose from 2.2 cases per 100,000 people in 2001, to 2.4 cases per 100,000 people in 2002, a 9.1 percent increase. Officials said this marks the second consecutive year the syphilis rate increased and estimate that 40 percent of all reported cases involved men who have sex with men.