

Prevalence of Syphilis among Adolescents aged 15–19 years in Durban: A retrospective analysis of 2017 data.

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Abstract

Introduction

South Africa carries one of the highest burdens of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) globally, with syphilis remaining a major public health concern. Despite being easily detectable and treatable, syphilis continues to contribute to significant morbidity and mortality worldwide. While elimination of mother-to-child transmission has been achieved in some countries, outbreaks persist in selected populations, including adolescents, where epidemiological data are often limited. In South Africa, reliable estimates of syphilis prevalence among teenagers remain scarce, despite alarming statistics that highlight the urgent need for early detection and targeted interventions.

Aim

This study aimed to determine the prevalence of syphilis among adolescents aged 15–19 years in Durban, South Africa, during the period January–December 2017. A secondary objective was to compare prevalence by sex.

Methodology

A cross-sectional study was conducted using retrospective laboratory records of adolescents aged 15–19 years tested for syphilis between January to December 2017. Both male and female patient results were included. Descriptive statistics were applied to determine overall prevalence and stratify findings by sex.

Results

A total of 224 patient records were reviewed. The overall prevalence of syphilis was 8% (18/224) among the records reviewed. The prevalence of syphilis was highest among 17- to 18-year-old individuals. Prevalence was higher among males (8.53%) than females (5.77%).

Conclusion

While the overall prevalence percentage was low, prevalence of syphilis remains a concern, particularly among male adolescents in Durban. These findings highlight the need for broader population-based studies across KwaZulu-Natal and nationally to strengthen prevention and early detection programs to reduce the burden of syphilis among young people.

Keywords: Syphilis; Adolescents; Prevalence; Sexually transmitted infections; South Africa; Public health