

**Testimony by Dr. Joseph LeMaster, Health Advisor to the  
Johnson County Department of Health & Environment (JCDHE) to  
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare  
Written Proponent for SB 404 – February 8, 2024**

Feb 5, 2024

Chairwoman Gossage and Members of the Committee,

I am writing today in support of and to provide my own regarding Senate Bill 404, which if passed will permit the use of expedited partner therapy (EPT) for the treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). JCDHE's mission is to promote and protect the health and environment for all who live, work and play in Johnson County.

CDC's annual report included startling preliminary data:

- 1.6 million chlamydial infections were reported. This 4.1 percent increase from 2020 signals a return to pre-pandemic levels. Untreated chlamydia may cause congenital conjunctivitis in children and is a major worldwide cause of trachoma, which leads to irreversible blindness.
- More than 700,000 gonorrhea cases were reported, reflecting a 28 percent increase since 2017.
- Reported cases of syphilis (all stages) totaled more than 176,000 cases – a 74 percent increase since 2017.
- Congenital syphilis continued to surge, increasing 203 percent since 2017. In 2021, 38 jurisdictions, including 37 states and the District of Columbia, reported an increase in congenital syphilis cases.<sup>1</sup>
- Per Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) data, rates of sexually treated infections in Kansas children nearly doubled from 2002 to 2022 (5.5 per 1000 to 9.3 per 1000), and in Johnson County infection rates increased 255% (1.8 per 1000 to 4.6 per 1000).

EPT is a means by which licensed clinical healthcare providers may treat the sex partners of patients diagnosed with chlamydia or gonorrhea by providing prescriptions or medications to the patient to take to their partner without the health care provider first examining the partner.

It is an evidence-based, scientifically supported strategy endorsed by a number of professional organizations including the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Society for Adolescent Medicine, the American Bar Association, and County Health Rankings and Roadmaps.

EPT is the safest means currently available to reduce the incidence of STIs and increase treatment rates. While some may raise concerns about antibiotic drug reactions among EPT recipients, reports from multi-site randomized trials and community-level studies of EPT for chlamydia and gonorrhea have not found an increased risk of anaphylaxis or other major adverse drug reactions.<sup>2</sup> Reactions to the antibiotics prescribed in EPT are rare among sexual partners, and can be dealt with pre-emptively



during the prescribing process.<sup>3</sup> EPT is already authorized in 46 states. Kansas one of only four states that does not explicitly allow EPT, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Given the recent increase in STI rates, the dire consequences of untreated infection, and the lack of adverse effects associated with EPT, and its widespread endorsement by the majority of concerned medical professional organizations in the US, as the local health officer and health advisor for Johnson County, I strongly recommend that the committee also recommend passage of SB 404

Sincerely,



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#### References:

1. National Association of County and City Health Officials. New CDC Report: More Than 2.5 Million U.S. Cases of Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Syphilis Were Reported in 2021. <https://www.naccho.org/blog/articles/new-cdc-report-more-than-2-5-million-u-s-cases-of-chlamydia-gonorrhea-and-syphilis-were-reported-in-2021>. Published 2023. Accessed Feb 5, 2024.
2. Golden, M. R., Kerani, R. P., Stenger, M., Hughes, J. P., Aubin, M., Malinski, C., & Holmes, K. T. (2015). Uptake and Population-Level Impact of Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT) on *Chlamydia trachomatis* and *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*: The Washington State Community-Level Randomized Trial of EPT. *PLoS Med*, 12(1). doi: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1001777
3. Stekler J, Bachmann L, Brotman RM, Erbeding EJ, Lloyd LV, Rietmeijer CA, Handsfield HH, Holmes KK, Golden MR. Concurrent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in sex partners of patients with selected STIs: implications for patient-delivered partner therapy. *Clin Infect Dis*. 2005 Mar 15;40(6):787-93. doi: 10.1086/428043. Epub 2005 Feb 21. PMID: 15736009.