
Thinking Matters Symposium

2020 Thinking Matters Symposium

May 8th, 12:00 AM

Sexually Transmitted Diseases: Trends in Maine and the US

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Milkowski, Carly, "Sexually Transmitted Diseases: Trends in Maine and the US" (2020). *Thinking Matters Symposium*. 62.

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Sexually Transmitted Diseases: Trends in Maine and the US

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Background

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are a significant public health concern, especially among adolescents and young adults, who account for more than half of new cases of STDs.¹ Recent data have shown that after decades of declining prevalence, STDs have made sharp and sustained increases nationwide.² With early diagnosis, most STDs are relatively easy to treat. If left untreated, however, STDs are more likely to be transmitted to other individuals and can cause lasting health problems including:

- Infertility
- Complications in pregnancy
- Increased risk for HIV³

Recognizing change in the prevalence of STDs is important to ensuring that appropriate resources are allocated to screening and prevention efforts.

Purpose

This study looked at changes in reported STD rates in Maine and the US over a 10 year period (2007-2017) that has seen increasing prevalence nationwide.

Methods

This study analyzed data on the rates of reported cases per 100,000 population for three common STDs: chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis (primary and secondary). Data came from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) STD Surveillance reports from 2007,⁴ 2012,⁵ and 2017.⁶

Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis are nationally notifiable diseases, and CDC STD Surveillance data is collected through mandated reporting of these diseases at the state and local levels.⁶ The study compared state level data from Maine to national rates, and percent changes were calculated for each disease over the time period.

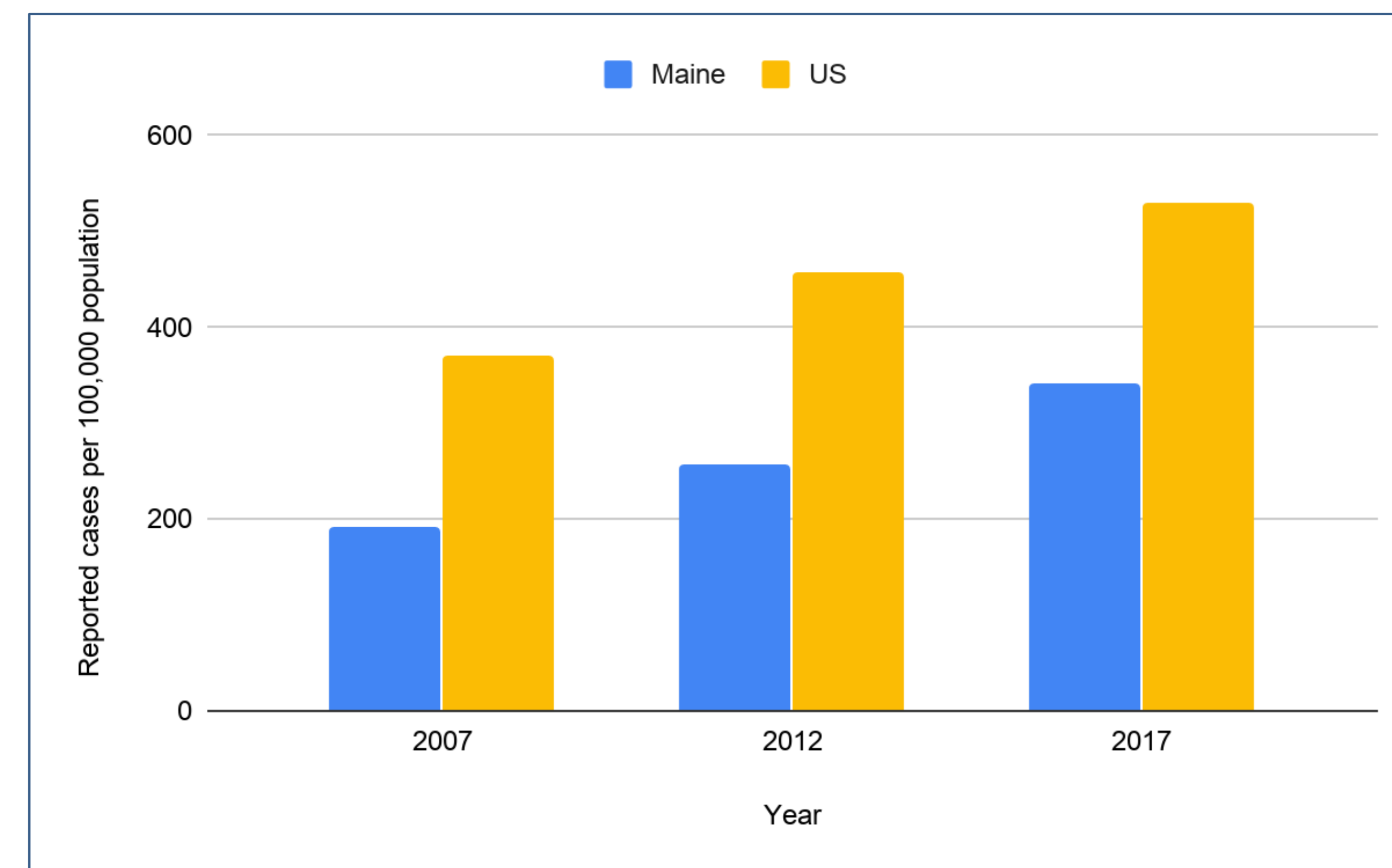


Figure 1. Chlamydia: Reported Cases

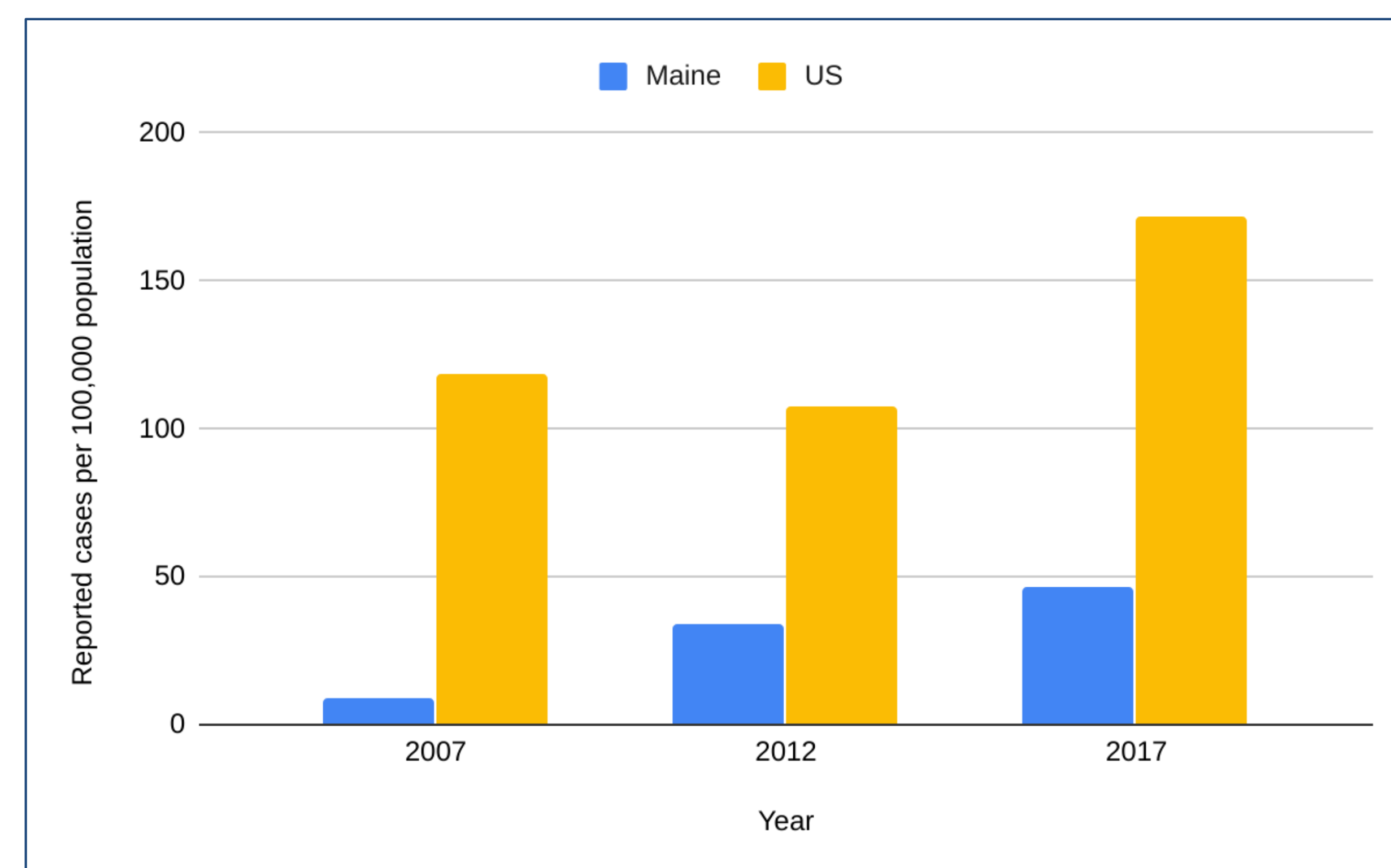


Figure 2. Gonorrhea: Reported Cases

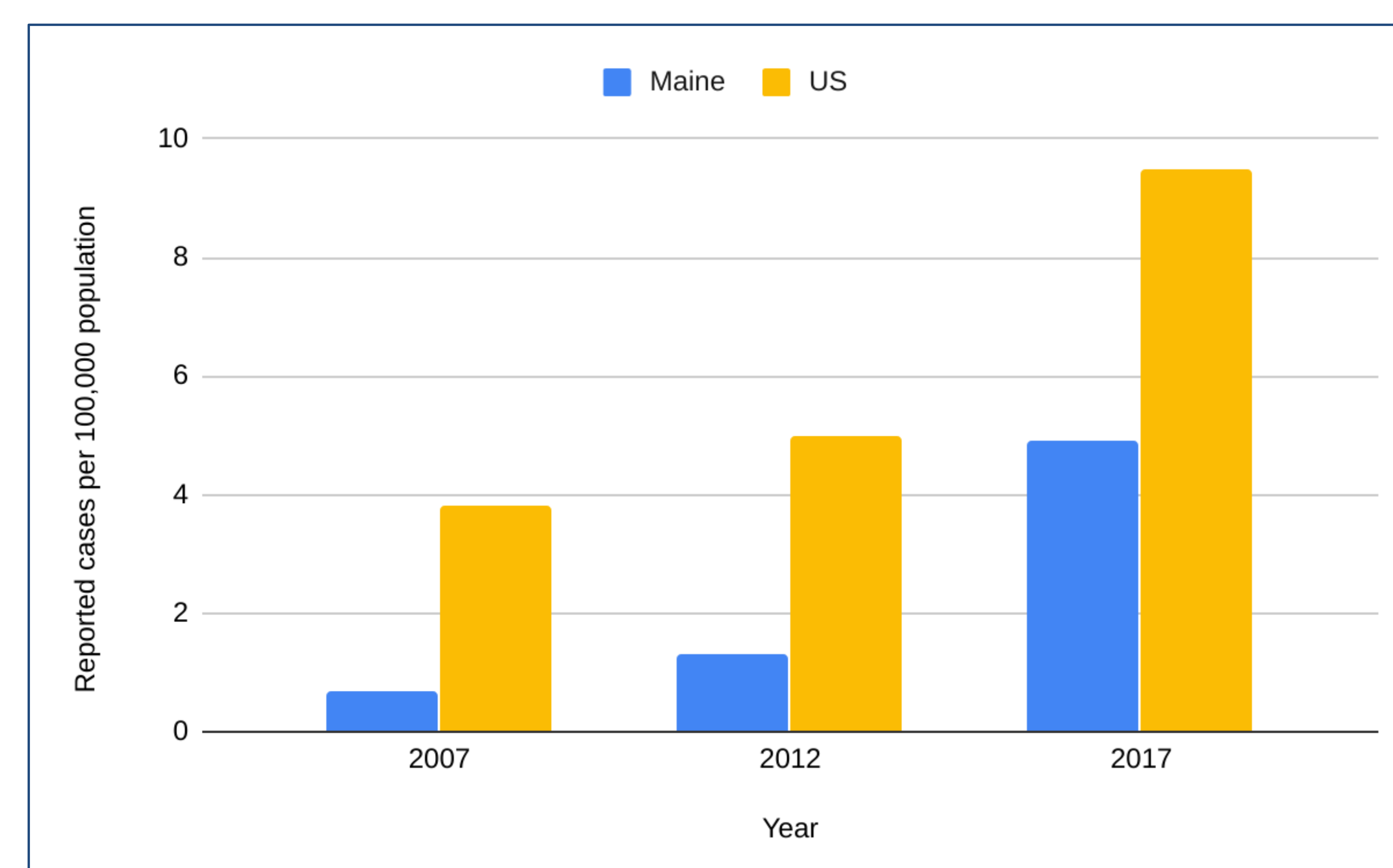


Figure 3. Primary & Secondary Syphilis: Reported Cases

Results

Maine saw increases in reported cases of all three STDs from 2007 to 2017 (Figures 1-3):

- Chlamydia: 192.3 to 342.1 per 100,000 (+77.9%)
- Gonorrhea: 8.9 to 46.6 per 100,000 (+423.6%)
- Syphilis: 0.7 to 4.9 per 100,000 (+600.0%)

Reported cases of the three STDs also increased nationally from 2007-2017 (Figures 1-3):

- Chlamydia: 370.2 to 528.8 per 100,000 (+42.8%)
- Gonorrhea: 118.9 to 171.9 per 100,000 (+44.6%)
- Syphilis: 3.8 to 9.5 per 100,000 (+150.0%)

Discussion

Reported rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis are lower in Maine than national averages, but the growth rates in Maine are outpacing those of the US as a whole. Chlamydia is the most common of the STDs in Maine, while syphilis saw the greatest percentage increase. It should be noted that the study shows reported, diagnosed cases of STDs, and that actual prevalence may be much higher given that many STDs go undiagnosed.³

Conclusion

The rise of reported STDs in Maine and the US underscore the need for adequate screening and prevention efforts. Recent changes in federal Title X funding, however, may make it harder to receive reproductive health services, including STD testing. The state of Maine should make every effort to continue funding for these services and strengthen education and outreach efforts to vulnerable populations.

References

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