



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department Promotes HIV Testing

June 27 is National HIV Testing Day



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BURLINGTON – The Vermont Department of Health encourages Vermonters to get an HIV test at their own doctor's office or at one of more than 30 free, anonymous testing sites around the state. June 27th is National HIV Testing Day, an annual observance to promote HIV testing in the U.S.

"HIV testing is now considered part of routine health screening," said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD. "It can take about 11 years before a person with HIV develops any outward symptoms of AIDS, but early diagnosis can make such a big difference in the health and lives of those who are infected."

An estimated 100 Vermonters have HIV but are not aware of it. Many people may learn of their status, and benefit from treatment, if they sought testing through their medical provider.

The Health Department sponsors a website – www.11years.org – that provides information about how the virus affects health, the importance of early diagnosis, and the range of services available to those who test positive. Many of the messages feature Vermonters, including local medical providers, who talk about the lag time between infection and symptoms.

A poster designed to be displayed at doctors' offices and medical clinics is available on the Health Department website at www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/aids/testing.aspx.

The poster encourages patients to request the HIV test or to learn more through other Health Department resources like the websites or an informational hotline.

HIV attacks the immune system and gradually disables it over a long period of time. Early diagnosis of HIV infection can prevent AIDS. Access to treatment can greatly improve health outcomes for people living with the virus.

The Health Department, along with the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, recommends that all sexually active people age 13 to 64 be tested for HIV. Most health insurance plans will cover the test. The Health Department also provides information through its network of free and anonymous testing sites for people who may be at higher risk and not comfortable asking their doctor.

People who test with their medical provider can have a blood test or an oral fluid (swab) test. The Health Department-sponsored sites offer oral testing.

HIV is spread primarily through unprotected sex and sharing needles and syringes. Consistent and correct use of condoms can greatly reduce the risk of sexual transmission. Never sharing syringes prevents transmission of the virus. A mother with HIV can pass the virus to her baby, although early diagnosis and medical care can greatly reduce this risk. The Health Department recommends that all pregnant women seek prenatal care and ask their medical provider for the HIV test.

For more information, go to www.11years.org, or call the Health Department's toll-free AIDS Hotline at 800-882-2437 weekdays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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