

November 30, 2017

ON WORLD AIDS DAY, FLORIDA HEALTH IN ST. LUCIE CONTINUES FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS



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St. Lucie County, FL — As the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie (DOH-St. Lucie) unite with others in communities worldwide, we observe World AIDS Day by showing support for people living with HIV and honoring those who have died from an AIDS-related illness. We also take this time to celebrate the caregivers, families, friends, and communities that support them. This year's national theme is "Increasing Impact Through Transparency, Accountability and Partnerships."

"St. Lucie's struggle with this infectious disease became a crisis, and we were highlighted in the Silence Is Death Report in 2006; where severe racial and ethnic HIV/AIDS, disparities reached epidemic proportion. Through community engagement, with strong leaders we addressed the issue through a collective impact process. Now, more than 10 years later, we rank number 19 out of 67 counties, and we have the largest decrease in new HIV infections in the state. DOH - St. Lucie continues to remain vigilant in addressing HIV/AIDS in St. Lucie, because we understand the impact this disease has on families and a community", said Clint Sperber, Health Officer and Administrator of the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie.

Over 1.1 million people in the US are living with HIV, and 1 in 7 of them don't know it. The department remains fully committed to fighting the spread of HIV in Florida and helping connect individuals who are positive with lifesaving treatment and services.

Florida is a national leader in HIV testing. DOH and our partners throughout Florida have made great strides in prevention, identifying infections early and getting people into treatment, however there is still much work to be done. The department is focusing on four key strategies to make an even greater impact on reducing HIV rates in Florida and getting to zero, including:

- Routine screening for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and implementation of CDC testing guidelines;
- Increased testing among high-risk populations and providing immediate access to treatment as well as re-engaging HIV positive persons into the care system, with the ultimate goal of getting HIV positive persons to an undetectable viral load;
- The use of PrEP and nPEP as prevention strategies to reduce the risk of contracting HIV; and

- Increased community outreach and awareness about HIV, high-risk behaviors, the importance of knowing one's status and if positive, quickly accessing and staying in treatment.

With early diagnosis, individuals can begin appropriate treatment and care resulting in better health outcomes. Studies have shown that providing antiretroviral therapy as early as possible after diagnosis improves a patient's health, reduces transmission and can eventually lead to undetectable viral loads of HIV. This model has been successfully implemented in Florida and there are currently 35 Test and Treat sites operating statewide.

As part of our strategic efforts to eliminate HIV in Florida, the Department of Health is currently working to make Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) medication available at no cost at all of the 67 county health departments within the next year. PrEP is a once-daily pill that can reduce the risk of acquiring HIV in HIV-negative individuals. **PrEP should be used in conjunction with other prevention methods like condoms to reduce the risk of infection.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), taking PrEP daily reduces the risk of getting HIV by more than 90 percent. DOH-St. Lucie is a Test and Treat site and we are now offering **PrEP**.

PrEP will be made available through CHD STD and Family Planning Clinics and patients can be provided with up to a 90-day supply of medications. Some CHDs may offer PrEP through a specialty clinic. Visit floridahealth.gov to locate the CHD in your county.

Every CHD also offers high-quality HIV testing services. Testing can be completed at your local county health department or you can locate HIV counseling, testing and referral sites by visiting www.KnowYourHIVStatus.com or texting your zip code to 477493.

PLEASE JOIN US

World AIDS Day Candlelight Vigil: Friday, December 1, 2017 - 5:30 p.m.

Location: Fort Pierce City Hall -100 US Highway 1, Fort Pierce, FL 34950

World AIDS Day Celebration: Saturday, December 2, 2017

Location: Lawnwood Stadium – 1302 Virginia Ave, Fort Pierce, FL 32982

Games, activities for children, fun vendors, community resources, free HIV/STD testing and "LIVE RADIO REMOTE"

For more information, call the Florida AIDS Hotline at 1-800-FLA-AIDS or 1-800-352-2437; En Espanol, 1-800-545-SIDA; In Creole, 1-800-AIDS-101.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](http://PublicHealthAccreditationBoard.org), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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