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## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN ST. LUCIE ENCOURAGES FLORIDIANS TO TEST YOUR WAY ON NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY



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**St. Lucie County, FL** —The Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie recognizes June 27 as National HIV Testing Day (NHTD). This year’s theme is “Test Your Way. Do It Today,” which serves as a reminder that HIV testing has never been more convenient because there are more ways than ever to get tested.

“Our clinic offers an immediate linkage to HIV care and initiation of treatment at the time of HIV diagnosis and/or at the time of returning to care after a gap in services. This service is also referred to as “test and treat” or “treatment as prevention” and provides multiple benefits to clients and the community. People who are living with HIV and take medicine as directed to treat HIV as soon as possible reduce the amount of HIV (or viral load) in their body which keeps their immune system working and slows the disease progression. Reducing and maintaining a low viral load also helps to prevent the risk for transmitting HIV to others through sex, needle sharing, mother to child during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding” said Clint Sperber, Health Officer for the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie County.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all individuals 13–64 years old be tested for HIV at least once during their lifetime, and persons at increased risk for HIV infection be tested at least annually.

Florida remains a national leader in HIV testing, with over 1,400 registered HIV test sites (including each county health department and community-based organizations) which provide high-quality, confidential testing services at low or no cost. Last year, more than 340,000 HIV tests were conducted through Florida’s registered HIV test sites. There are currently 15 registered testing sites in Area 15 (including Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St Lucie Counties’ health department sites and community-based organizations) and over 7,000 HIV tests were conducted in Area 15 last year. Testing is also available through doctor’s offices and other health care facilities.

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 HIV viral loads.

DOH-St. Lucie hosts:

**National HIV Testing Day Outreach**

**Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup> - 11am to 3pm**

**The Up Center**

**2520 Orange Avenue - Fort Pierce FL 34947**

***Free HIV/STD Testing and gift cards provided for those that get tested.***

HIV-negative individuals are encouraged to reduce the chance of contracting HIV by using prevention strategies. As part of our strategic efforts to eliminate HIV in Florida, the Department is working to make Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) medication available at no cost at all 67 CHDs by the end of this year. PrEP is a once-daily pill that can reduce the chance of acquiring HIV in HIV-negative individuals. **PrEP should be used in conjunction with other prevention methods like condoms to reduce the chance of infection.** According to CDC, taking PrEP daily reduces the chance of getting HIV by more than 90 percent.

PrEP will be made available through CHD Sexually Transmitted Disease 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. Find a PrEP provider near you with the department's [PrEP Providers List](#).

You can locate HIV counseling, testing and referral sites by visiting [www.KnowYourHIVStatus.com](http://www.KnowYourHIVStatus.com) or texting 'FLHIV' to 898211.

For more information, call the Florida HIV/AIDS Hotline at 1-800-FLA-AIDS or 1-800-352-2437; En Español, 1-800-545-SIDA; In Creole, 1-800-AIDS-101. To chat with a live counselor at the Florida HIV/AIDS Hotline, visit [www.211bigbend.org/flhivaids hotline](http://www.211bigbend.org/flhivaids hotline).

### **About the Florida Department of Health**

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

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