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DOH-PASCO OBSERVES WORLD AIDS DAY, CONTINUES FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS ACROSS STATE



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PASCO COUNTY, Fla. – Every year, December 1 marks the global observance of World AIDS Day. This year's national World AIDS Day theme is Ending the HIV Epidemic: Community by Community. The Florida Department of Health is calling on Floridians in all communities to unite in support of those living with HIV and to remember those who we've lost. The Florida Department of Health in Pasco County (DOH-Pasco) is recognizing World AIDS Day at our free testing event on December 6 from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 10841 Little Rd. in New Port Richey.

DOH-Pasco, in conjunction with the Public Defender's Mobile Medical Unit, offers free rapid HIV and hepatitis C testing to the public at several locations throughout Pasco County each month. Additional free testing for sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) is sometimes available as well. Results from the rapid tests are available in 20 minutes. Calendars with times and locations for the free testing are available to view on DOH-Pasco's HIV/AIDS webpage at Pasco.FloridaHealth.gov.

In 2018, there were 119,661 people living with HIV in Florida. More than half of the 4,906 new diagnoses were for people between the ages of 20 and 39. Our state experiences a high burden of the HIV epidemic and the Department is committed to connecting people to the resources they need to be able to live long, healthy lives.

In February 2019, President Trump announced his administration's goal to end the HIV epidemic in the United States by 2030. The resulting initiative, Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America (EHE), is already well underway. The goal of EHE is to reduce new HIV infections by 75 percent in the next five years and by 90 percent by 2030.

Florida is a national leader in HIV testing, and the Florida Department of Health (DOH) has made great strides in prevention, early identification and treatment. In an effort to reach the goal of zero new HIV transmissions and reduced HIV-related deaths, DOH is focusing on four key strategies:

- Implementing routine screening for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, especially among high-risk populations.

- Providing immediate access to treatment for the newly diagnosed as well as retaining HIV-positive persons in the care system, with the ultimate goal of getting HIV-positive persons to an undetectable viral load.
- Improving and promoting the use of PrEP and nPEP as prevention strategies to reduce the risk of contracting HIV.
- Increasing community outreach and awareness about HIV, high-risk behaviors and the importance of knowing one's status.

It's crucial that people living with HIV begin treatment as soon as possible. With early diagnosis, individuals can begin appropriate treatment and care resulting in better health outcomes. Receiving antiretroviral therapy as quickly as possible after diagnosis improves the health of persons living with HIV and can eventually lead to undetectable viral loads, which reduces the chance of transmission to others.

As part of our strategic efforts to eliminate HIV in Florida, DOH offers Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) medication at no cost, and it is available at all of the 67 county health departments (CHDs) in their STD or Family Planning clinics. PrEP is a once-daily pill that can reduce HIV-negative individuals' risk of acquiring HIV. **PrEP should be used in conjunction with other prevention methods, like condoms, to reduce the risk of transmission.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, taking PrEP daily reduces the risk of contracting HIV by more than 90 percent.

Patients can obtain up to a 90-day supply of PrEP through their local CHD STD and Family Planning Clinic. Some CHDs may offer PrEP through specialty clinics. View the department's [PrEP Locator](#) to find a PrEP provider in your area.

DOH-Pasco offers PrEP services at three clinic locations:

- 33845 FL-54, Wesley Chapel, FL, 813-780-0740
- 10841 Little Rd., New Port Richey, 727-861-5260 ext. 0901
- 13941 15th St., Dade City, 352-521-1450 ext. 6118/6100/6119

Every CHD offers high-quality HIV testing services, but you can also locate HIV counseling, testing and referral sites by visiting KnowYourHIVStatus.com or texting your zip code to 477493.

For more information, call the Florida AIDS Hotline at 1-800-FLA-AIDS or 1-800-352-2437; en Español, 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](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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