Quick & FREE HIV Tests Offered June 27th

by Bend Weekly News Sources

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Several goals of the free test day are to build citizen awareness of the Virus, to get people carrying the Virus on medications and to prevent the spread of the Virus to other people.

The free HIV rapid tests will confidentially be given to citizens from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm at the Deschutes County Health Center located at 1128 NW Harriman, behind the Deschutes County Courthouse, in Bend.

The HIV Health Crisis: In the United States, a national HIV/AIDS health crisis is taking place. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that between 850,000 and 950,000 Americans are living with HIV (the virus that can cause AIDS), yet nearly 180,000 to 280,000 are unaware they are infected.

Clearly, HIV/AIDS has had a devastating impact on all Americans, including gay and bisexual men, people who are disenfranchised and more recently, women and those within communities of Color. It is in the shadow of these grim statistics, that it is essential to emphasize the importance of National HIV Testing Day on Tuesday, June 27.

â€œThis annual observance raises awareness and enables people to gain the knowledge they need to take control of their health and lives. It is also an invaluable opportunity to dispel the myths and the fear that often keeps many from coming forward for HIV testing. Testing is important because early detection of the disease allows for early treatment, prolonged life and quality of life improvement,â€• says Deschutes County Healthâ€™s HIV Program Director Susan McCreedy.

Awareness is Key: It is estimated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, that as many as 25% to 30% of persons infected with HIV in the Nation are not aware of their infection. At the same time, it is also estimated that the vast majority of NEW infections (up to 75%) are transmitted by this 25% to 30% of infected-but unaware-group.

The aim of CDCâ€™s HIV Prevention Initiative is to get persons with HIV tested and set up to receive the latest care and treatment for HIV disease. National HIV Testing Day aims to target people who are unaware

of being infected with HIV.

What is HIV Your Risk? Part of the problem nationally, and in smaller populations, like Central Oregon, is that people often do not have an accurate perception of their own risks for HIV. In fact, the Deschutes County Health Department often sees people who are worried about the disease but have very little risks. The Department often finds that people who may have the virus and need to be tested and treated, often do not come in for services.

HIV is now much more of a chronic long-term condition that, with proper and timely treatment, can be managed relatively well. This also means that persons living with this infection are living longer, healthier lives and are possibly having sex more often (possibly spreading the virus to others). It is imperative that these individuals learn of their HIV status and know how NOT to transmit their infection to others, or how not to get any other Sexually Transmitted Infection (STIs) themselves, including a second HIV infection with possibly a new strain of HIV.

Risks for HIV infection are: Unprotected sex with an infected individual, sharing drug needles, piercing tools or equipment with an infected person, and from an infected mother to her fetus during gestation or childbirth, or during breastfeeding. People who contract other STIs may be considered at risk for HIV, since infections are passed in the same ways.

Persons with multiple or anonymous sex partners, injection drug users, and women who may be pregnant should seriously consider taking the HIV antibody test. If you have had sex with or have shared ANY needle or snorting drug use equipment with anyone whose sex or drug use history you do not know, you may want to make an appointment to see a health educator or counselor. A health professional can help you to develop an accurate and clear picture of your own real risks for HIV infection.

Learning your HIV status early-on can help you stay healthy. If you are a woman at risk, and you may be pregnant, knowing your HIV status can save your baby's life by allowing you to take steps to avoid passing the virus to your baby.

Private & Confidential HIV Counseling: Confidential counseling and testing for HIV as well as other STIs is available through your private medical provider or at the Deschutes County Health Department (DCHD). Call 322-7400 to make an appointment if you may be at risk.

Confidentiality ensures that people coming to the Health Department for services have their identity and privacy protected. Anonymous HIV testing (where no identifiers are given) is also an option at DCHD.

Remember, it is not who or what you are that puts you at risk for HIV - it is what you do. Talk with your doctor or an HIV counselor (322-7400) if you have questions, or call the National HIV Hotline at 1 (800)

342-2437 for more information.

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