

June 25, 2019

Bay County Health Department Recognizes HIV Testing Day



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Panama City, Fla. — June 27, 2019, commemorates National HIV Testing Day (NHTD). First observed in 1995, NHTD is meant to encourage people to be aware of their HIV status so that they can take control of their health. This year's theme, "**Doing It My Way,**" highlights how and why people make testing a part of their lives. The Bay County Health Department joins community partners across the country to emphasize the importance of getting tested, knowing your status, and getting linked to care and treatment.

"There are so many ways people can get tested for HIV in Bay and surrounding counties," said Sandon S. Speedling, MHS, CPM, Interim Health Officer for DOH-Bay. "Of course, they can get them at their local health department or the community-based organization, BASIC of Northwest Florida. They can also do it at home, at the doctor's office, and/or with a friend."

In 2017, 116,944 Floridians were confirmed to be living with HIV. An estimated 18,000 more were living with HIV but unaware of it. "To see these numbers come down in our state, we need to recognize the role of stigma as a barrier to getting tested," said department HIV/AIDS Section Administrator Laura Reeves. "Normalizing HIV testing and making sure there's a testing option that works for everyone is one way to reduce stigma. This is important, because knowing your HIV status gives you the power to make informed decisions about your health. Our goal is to work with our partners to make sure every Floridian has that power."

Get Tested.

Did you know that there's more than one type of HIV test? Most use either a blood sample or fluid swabbed from the inside of your cheek. There are different settings in which you can take an HIV test, too, including in the comfort and privacy of your own home. Visit KnowYourHIVStatus.com to learn more about testing options in your area or to order a free at-home HIV testing kit mailed directly to the address of your choice (while supplies last).

Knowing your HIV status is just the beginning.

It's crucial that people living with HIV begin treatment as soon as possible. Immediate treatment with antiretroviral therapy (ART) typically leads to long, healthy lives for people living with HIV. It's also a method of HIV prevention. ART reduces the amount of HIV in the body, which makes it harder to transmit to others. People living with HIV who reach and maintain what's called "viral suppression" (fewer than 200 copies of HIV per milliliter of blood) have effectively no risk of sexually transmitting HIV to an HIV-negative partner.

There are also prevention tools for people who haven't been diagnosed with HIV. While HIV prevention is truly a group effort, it can look very different from person to person. A health care provider can do a risk/needs assessment to determine appropriate next steps, which might include taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and using condoms to reduce the risk of acquiring HIV. Prevention may also take the form of regular retesting.

Observe NHTD with us!

The Bay County Health Department will be hosting the following events:

Wednesday, June 26:

1. Florida Dept. of Health in **Jackson** County
4979 Healthy Way
Marianna, FL 32446
9am to 3pm (CST)
Testing, education & giveaways
2. Florida Dept. of Health in **Gulf** County (Port St. Joe)
2475 Garrison Ave.
Port St Joe, FL 32456
10am to 3pm (EST)
Testing, education & giveaways
3. Florida Dept. of Health in **Gulf** County (Wewahitchka)
807 FL-22
Wewahitchka, FL 32465
10am to 3pm (CST)
Testing, education & giveaways

Thursday, June 27:

1. Florida Dept. of Health **Bay** County
597 W. 11th Street
Panama City, FL 32401
9am to 3pm (CST)
Testing, education & giveaways

Friday, June 28:

1. Florida Dept. of Health in **Holmes** County
603 Scenic Hill Circle
Bonifay, FL 32425
9am to 3pm (CST)
Testing, education & giveaways
2. Florida Dept. of Health in **Washington** County
1338 South Blvd.
Chipley, FL 32428
9am to 3pm (CST)
Testing, education & giveaways

Protect yourself. Get tested. Know your status. Learn what's next.

For more information, please call [Number] or 1-800-FLA-AIDS. Visit Bay.FloridaHealth.gov or KnowYourHIVStatus.com.

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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