

22 November, 2018

## HIV TESTING KEY TO EARLY DIAGNOSIS

With almost half of all people diagnosed with HIV in the late stage of infection, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District is marking HIV Awareness Week by urging those at risk to be regularly tested.

During HIV Awareness Week (23-30 November) and in the lead up to World AIDS Day on 1 December, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District is reminding people to test for HIV with various high quality HIV testing options now available.

In 2018-19, NSW Health is investing \$21.9 million in services to strengthen HIV testing, treatment and prevention.

Dr Josephine Lusk, Director, Short Street Sexual Health Centre, St George Hospital, said NSW is on track to significantly reducing HIV transmission by 2020, with a 23 per cent drop in the number of new diagnoses in NSW, for the period January to September 2018, compared to the average number for the same period in the previous five years.

“We want to see this downward trend continue and urge anyone at risk of HIV to ensure they are regularly tested,” Dr Lusk said.

“Once a person is diagnosed, they can start treatment early, improve their health and prevent the virus from being passed on to others.”

From January to September 2018, 191 NSW residents presented with a newly diagnosed HIV infection compared with the average number of 249 for the same period in the previous five years, according to the NSW HIV Data Report.

“This reduction is due to more people seeking early testing and treatment, as well as the introduction of pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV (PrEP),” Dr Lusk said.

PrEP, the use of medications to prevent HIV in those at risk, is also used traditionally to treat the infection. It is available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

“The highly successful NSW Health EPIC-NSW trial made PrEP available to 9,414 people at risk of HIV from 1 March 2016 to 30 April 2018.”

The data also shows from January to September 2018 there were 42 per cent fewer Australian-born men having sex with men diagnosed with early stage HIV infection, compared to the same period over the past five years.

“HIV in overseas-born men who have sex with men as well as heterosexual men, is often diagnosed late, which can lead to avoidable HIV-related illness,” Dr Lusk said.

For information on HIV testing, visit [www.health.nsw.gov.au/hiv-test](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/hiv-test)