

Monday 8 July 2013

SESLHD reminder about the importance of HIV testing

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District's HIV and Related Programs Unit is calling on people to 'get tested', as part of NSW Health's *HIV Strategy 2012-2015 'A New Era'*, which aims to raise awareness and improve health outcomes for people with HIV.

Figures reveal a 24 per cent rise in HIV infections in 2012 among NSW residents; 409 NSW residents were newly diagnosed with HIV infection last year compared to 330 in 2011.

The data showed that of the 409 diagnoses in 2012, 81 per cent were acquired by homosexually active men, 14 per cent by heterosexually active persons, and two per cent through sharing injecting equipment.

SESLHD had 148 newly diagnosed HIV infections in 2012, a 20% increase compared to 2011.

Director at the Sydney Sexual Health Centre Associate Professor Anna McNulty said the rise in those being diagnosed may be due to more people getting tested, however some of the rise is also due to unprotected sex. Using condoms is still the most safe and effective way to prevent HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections.

"SESLHD has introduced a range of health promotion and health education messages and strategies aimed at reducing HIV infection including encouraging more frequent testing for homosexually active men," she said.

"It is likely any increase in testing rates for HIV will result in an increase in HIV detection amongst those in SESLHD.

"It is important people ask their health care provider for a test if they think they are at risk and for them to know there are specialist services available for support, information and treatment if required," A/Prof McNulty said.

NSW Health's 'New Era' strategy is aimed at driving down HIV infections, and improving health outcomes for individuals with HIV through:

- Reinforcing the importance of condom use
- Earlier detection through increased testing
- Promoting the benefits of early treatment
- Implementing a new advice and support program for doctors and their patients at the time of diagnosis

For free and confidential sexual health support and information, call the NSW Sexual Health Infoline on 1800 451 624 (Mon - Fri 9am-5.30pm) or the HIV information line 1800 451 600 (Mon - Fri (9am-6.30pm).

For further information: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sexualhealth/Pages/hiv.aspx>

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