

Tuesday, May 24

## NSW HEALTH TO STAGE HIV TESTING WEEK AGAIN IN 2016

Around 14 per cent of people with HIV in NSW may be unaware they have the virus, a statistic NSW Health is looking to change.

As well as risking their own health, people with undiagnosed HIV infection could be unknowingly passing the virus onto others.

NSW Health will again unite for *HIV Testing Week* from 1-7 June and will be encouraging people at risk to have a HIV test as getting a HIV test is now easier and faster than ever before.

HIV Testing Week aims to raise awareness of the importance of HIV testing to improve health outcomes and to reduce HIV transmission. NSW Health is encouraging gay and homosexually active men and others who are at risk to get a HIV test and to test often.

LHD Director HIV/Sexual Health, Christopher O'Reilly, said NSW had made significant progress in making HIV testing easier and faster by providing a mix of high quality, safe and innovative HIV testing services such as rapid HIV testing, express clinics, after hours and drop in clinics.

"This is in addition to providing faster results and online bookings which are all part of a new era in HIV testing," Mr O'Reilly said.

"With around 11,500 people in NSW living with HIV infection, HIV testing is vital because HIV is often transmitted by people who don't know they have the virus.

"We need people in groups at risk of HIV especially to test regularly so they can receive early treatment and prevent transmission of HIV to others."

Most new HIV infections reported in 2015 were in gay and homosexually-active men (81 per cent) with heterosexual people accounting for 15 per cent of all newly reported infections. 29 per cent of people newly diagnosed with HIV were diagnosed late during their infection, which could have been avoided with earlier testing.

In South Eastern Sydney in 2015, a significant number of new HIV infections were in people born overseas.

During HIV Testing Week a SESLHD pop-up rapid HIV testing van and a health promotion stall will be touring St George.

The testing van and stall will be at Montgomery Street, Kogarah on June 1 and 2 and at Railway Parade on June 3. The stall will be at Hurstville on June 6 and 7.

Health and multicultural workers will be offering rapid HIV tests at Kogarah (only) and information to promote HIV testing amongst the local community.

There will be a talk and afternoon tea on June 1 at Kogarah Library and Cultural Centre for the community with a conversation about efforts in NSW to end the transmission of HIV by 2020 and a person sharing their personal experience of HIV diagnosis and living with HIV.

The number of HIV tests done in NSW increased again in 2015 with almost 500,000 tests done, a seven per cent rise on the number of tests done in 2014.

“Communities and health professionals in NSW should be congratulated for this increase, yet more needs to be done to virtually eliminate HIV transmission by 2020. This means increasing HIV testing among both high risk and ‘unlikely patient’ groups in a broader range of health services,” Mr O’Reilly said.

“As well as gay and homosexually active men including those aged over 50 years, heterosexual people who may be at risk of HIV should also be tested. This includes people from countries where there are high rates of HIV, anyone with a sexual partner from a high risk country and people who have had unprotected sex while travelling in these countries. Anyone who has had unprotected sex with a high risk person should also be tested.

All pregnant women should also be tested irrespective of risk, as treatment during pregnancy is very effective in stopping the baby from getting infected.

“Achieving high levels of testing, treatment, and maintaining safe sex practices are the key if we are to achieve our ambitious target of ending HIV transmission by 2020.

“During HIV Testing Week, we are encouraging people to help end HIV transmission by 2020 by getting tested.”

People can request HIV testing at their GP or health service. The driving force behind these advances is the new *NSW HIV Strategy 2016-2020* which has the goal of virtually eliminating HIV transmission by 2020.

To find out where to get tested go to:

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/sexualhealth/pages/sexual-health-clinics.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sexualhealth/pages/sexual-health-clinics.aspx)

For more information on HIV testing, treatment and prevention go to

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/endinghiv/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/endinghiv/Pages/default.aspx) or call the NSW Sexual Health Infolink 1800 451 624 [www.shil.nsw.gov.au](http://www.shil.nsw.gov.au) .

For more information on HIV notifications in NSW in 2015 go to

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/endinghiv/Documents/q4-2015-and-annual-hiv-data-report.pdf> .

**Media enquiries: Deborah Field, media and communications officer, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, 9382 8398, 0411 730 842, [deborah.field@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:deborah.field@health.nsw.gov.au)**