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Michelle Peregoy (804) 864-7963

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SUGGESTS ALL THIRTEEN TO SIXTY-FOUR YEAR OLDS GET TESTED FOR HIV

(Richmond, Va.)— In observance of National HIV Testing Day on June 27, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) encourages individuals ages 13 to 64 to get tested for HIV. New guidelines issued in September 2006 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend routine testing for everyone in this age group; a change from focusing only on people with specific risk factors.

Local health departments and community-based organizations across the state will sponsor special testing events and educational programs. Free, confidential testing will be offered in numerous locations with oral, rapid or anonymous testing available in some areas.

“Stigma continues to be a challenge in combating HIV,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P. H. “Some people avoid getting an HIV test because they are uncomfortable bringing up the topic with their health care provider. By making HIV testing a routine part of medical care like cholesterol tests or blood pressure screenings, we hope to reduce the stigma.”

The new guidelines are supported by compelling research. Forty-one percent of people with HIV are diagnosed late in the disease process, when treatment is less effective. HIV-infected persons who know their status are much less likely to transmit the infection to others; however, 25% of people living with HIV are unaware of their infection. Approximately 7,200 Virginians may be undiagnosed and unaware of their HIV infection.

“We are encouraging people to ask their doctors about HIV testing on their next office visit,” stated Kathryn A. Hafford, M.S., Acting Director of VDH’s Division of Disease Prevention. “Special testing events should not be the only time people think about an HIV test.”

Information about HIV and HIV testing can be obtained through the Division of Disease Prevention Hotline at (800) 533-4148 or on the Web at: www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/diseaseprevention. A listing of National HIV Testing Day events in Virginia is also available on this website. Events are subject to change.

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