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June 26, 2008

**TEXT MESSAGE TECHNOLOGY HELPS VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
PROMOTE NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY JUNE 27TH**

(Richmond, VA)— In addition to calling the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), people now have another resource for determining their HIV status. To locate the nearest HIV testing location, text your zip code to “KNOWIT” or 566938 and within seconds receive a return text with the name, location and phone number of the testing site nearest you. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provide this texting tool nationwide.

“People need access to information that can improve their health,” explained Kathryn Hafford, Director of the VDH Division of Disease Prevention. “The anonymity of sending a text message to get information about HIV testing may be more appealing to some people than making a phone call.”

Between 1997 and 2007, the number of people reported to be living with HIV/AIDS in Virginia tripled from 6,730 to 20,057. Forty-one percent of people with HIV are diagnosed late in the disease process, when treatment is less effective. It is estimated that one-fourth of people living with HIV/AIDS are undiagnosed and unaware of their infection, bringing the total estimated number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Virginia to around 27,000. “We urge everyone to find out their HIV status because early detection and use of medical services can delay the onset of AIDS,” explained Elaine Martin, VDH Director of HIV Prevention. “HIV-infected persons who know their status are much less likely to transmit the infection to others.”

In 2007, non-Hispanic blacks accounted for 20% of the Virginia population, and for 62% of the 20,057 persons reported in Virginia living with HIV/AIDS. Non-Hispanic blacks in the Central, Northern and Eastern Virginia regions were almost 6 times more likely to be living with HIV/AIDS than whites in the same areas. During this year’s National HIV Testing Day campaign, VDH is addressing this disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS. Public service announcements encouraging HIV testing began airing on radio stations statewide June 16. 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 locations across the state with oral, rapid, or anonymous testing available in some areas.

Information about HIV and HIV testing can be obtained through the Division of Disease Prevention Hotline at (800) 533-4148 or visit: 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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