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WHY BEING TESTED FOR HIV IS SO IMPORTANT

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The message is simple: get tested for HIV.

Every 9 ½ minutes, someone in the United States is infected with HIV, according to the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control. In Virginia, the State Department of Health reports that one out of every 370 Virginians has the virus. Based on CDC national estimates that 21 percent of those who are infected with HIV/AIDS are unaware of that, VDH estimates that 5,500 Virginians do not know that they are infected with HIV/AIDS.

The health department urges all Virginians between the ages of 13 and 64 to be tested for HIV, in accordance with the latest CDC guidelines.

“Treatment of HIV/AIDS is more effective when it begins early. While we are concerned about every case, we especially want to reach those people who have HIV but are unaware of their infection,” said Kathryn Hafford, Director of the VDH Division of Disease Prevention. “Early detection and use of medical services can delay the onset of AIDS. HIV-infected persons who know their status also are much less likely to transmit the infection to others.”

This Saturday, June 27, is National HIV Testing Day. Community-based organizations and local health departments are sponsoring events to increase awareness of HIV and to encourage testing. Many locations will offer free, confidential testing and others will provide oral, rapid, or anonymous testing.

“Stigma continues to be a challenge in combating HIV,” Hafford said. “Some people avoid testing for HIV because they are uncomfortable bringing up the topic with their health care provider. We hope to reduce the stigma by making HIV testing a routine part of medical care, just as cholesterol tests or blood pressure screenings.”

Among the most effective prevention measures are:

- Knowing your HIV status

- Protecting yourself and others from HIV
- Mobilizing to overcome the challenges and barriers to HIV prevention , including access to care
- Ensuring that HIV prevention and testing services, medical care and treatment are available

For information about HIV and HIV testing, call the Division of Disease Prevention Hotline at (800) 533-4148 or visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/diseaseprevention. Virginians can also visit www.HIVTest.org to find an HIV testing center by Zip code. A listing of National HIV Testing Day events in Virginia is also available on this Web site. Events are subject to change.

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