



Department
of Health



Public Health
England



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To: NHS Trust Medical Directors

NATIONAL HIV TESTING WEEK – 22-29 NOVEMBER 2013

We are writing to:

- give you advance notice of National HIV Testing Week
- provide information to support HIV testing in hospital trusts

National HIV Testing Week will take place from Friday 22 November to Friday 29 November and will follow awareness-raising activity starting in October. This programme, led by the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) and funded by the Department of Health, may result in your services receiving requests for an HIV test or information about HIV. Promoting HIV testing is part of a broader national programme of HIV prevention work which includes the national *It Starts with Me* programme which also promotes condom use.

During this important initiative, which started last year, THT and other sexual health and HIV organisations will be promoting the benefits of HIV testing to gay and bisexual men and African communities, who remain the populations most at risk of HIV in England. Last year over 6,000 people were newly diagnosed with HIV and of these 47% were diagnosed “late”, that is after the point at which treatment is recommended. A person with HIV is ten times more likely to die within a year if they are diagnosed late. Of the 100,000 people estimated to be living with HIV in the UK almost a quarter remain undiagnosed and are therefore unable to benefit from effective treatment and risk transmitting HIV to uninfected partners. Late diagnosis adds substantially to the costs associated with treatment and care for HIV.

There are many opportunities for NHS organisations to support National HIV Testing Week. Last year for example, some hospital trusts ran expanded access to HIV testing in Accident and Emergency departments and in out-patient services, whilst some community trusts expanded HIV testing in community clinics.

The British HIV Association and British Association of Sexual Health and HIV will support National HIV Testing Week by encouraging all clinicians in both hospital and primary care to be alert to the need to offer and recommend an HIV test. This is especially important if their patient is from a group at increased risk of HIV or they present with symptoms or signs of HIV.¹ HIV like other sexually transmitted infections, continues to attract stigma which can deter some patients from asking for a test or information about HIV. However

¹ For a full list of indicator conditions see: Recommended UK National Guidelines for HIV Testing 2008


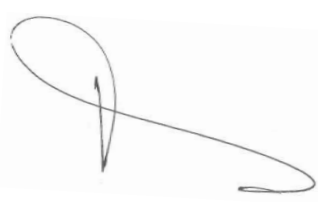

<http://www.bhiva.org/documents/Guidelines/Testing/GlinesHIVTest08.pdf>

findings from pilot studies funded by the Department of Health² indicated that healthcare professionals offering an HIV test is acceptable to the public and uptake is very high.

For those diagnosed in time the vast majority of people living with HIV in the UK can expect a near normal life expectancy thanks to the benefits of effective treatment and the excellent care provided by the NHS. Early diagnosis also allows people to make behavioural changes, including using condoms, to prevent onward transmission.

Information and resources to support increased HIV testing in primary care and non-specialist hospital departments are available from the Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health³ and through guidelines produced by the British HIV Association.

Information and web-based resources about National HIV Testing Week are available from <http://www.hivpreventionengland.org.uk/Campaigns-Current/National-HIV-Testing-Week>

<p>Professor Kevin Fenton</p>  <p>Director of Health Improvement Public Health England</p>	<p>Dr Felicity Harvey</p>  <p>Director General Public Health Department of Health</p>	<p>Sir Bruce Keogh</p>  <p>National Medical Director NHS England</p>
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² Health Protection Agency 2012 – Evidence and resources to commission expanded HIV testing in priority medical services in high prevalence areas. April 2012

³ <http://www.medfash.org.uk/publications> Tackling HIV Testing Resource Pack, HIV in Primary Care