

PRESS RELEASE

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HIV testing – the key to early diagnosis, treatment and prevention.

Brussels, 1 December 2010

“Know, treat, prevent”: with this call for an uptake in HIV testing today the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) launches its guidance on HIV testing. Recent data shows that the number of people infected with HIV continues to rise with an estimated 850,000 people in Europe living with HIVⁱ – however, an estimated one third of those infected are unaware that they are HIV positiveⁱⁱ because they have not been tested. As a consequence, these individuals are not able to benefit from available treatment and might unknowingly transmit HIV/AIDS to others, such as partners or unborn children.

Launching the ECDC guidance on HIV testing today at the European Parliament in Brussels, ECDC Director Marc Sprenger emphasised:

“The number of people in Europe who are unaware of their HIV infection or are diagnosed at a late stage is a significant problem. Individuals who do not know that they are infected are more likely to transmit HIV and are at an increased risk of HIV-related illness and possibly death. Early detection and diagnosis are vital for access to treatment and care. Nowadays treatment will help towards an almost normal life span largely free of serious illness. Knowing about your HIV status implies significant benefits for both yourself and the community.”

The ECDC guidance aims to support countries in their testing efforts to identify HIV infections early. It provides key information on why, where, how and when to test for HIV and aims to inform existing national HIV testing strategies in Member States to adopt a strategic, evidence-based approach to develop and implement effective HIV testing procedures. In addition, the guidance gives detailed advice to identify potential barriers to testing, define strategies to increase the uptake of national HIV testing as well as on monitoring and evaluating of the testing programmes.

Current surveillance data shows that within the European Union more than 25,000 new HIV cases are diagnosed each year with the largest number and continuous increase in HIV infection being observed among men who have sex with men (MSM)ⁱⁱⁱ. Compared to those diagnosed late, the cost of treatment and care for individuals diagnosed early after infection is significantly lower. The promotion of HIV testing and earlier diagnosis will have a major impact for the individual, in terms of improved prognosis, and for the community due to possible reduction in the onward transmission of HIV.

ECDC Director Marc Sprenger pointed out:

“There is a need for action. For example, we are concerned about the continuous increase of HIV infection among MSM. Those at high risk must be aware of the importance of testing and preventative measures including increased awareness campaigns and the use of condoms. HIV testing is an effective strategy for prevention. ECDC’s guidance on HIV testing outlines a strategic approach to develop effective national HIV testing interventions and to ensure access for all Europeans to HIV testing and counselling services. Only if you know about your HIV status you can be effectively treated and prevent others from being infected.”

World AIDS Day

World AIDS Day was introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1988 and is observed on 1 December to raise awareness of the AIDS pandemic caused by HIV infection.

Links

The ECDC guidance on HIV testing is available in a long version and as summary on our website:
<http://ecdc.europa.eu>

You'll find the supporting evidence synthesis for the ECDC guidance on HIV testing on our website:
<http://ecdc.europa.eu>

The HIV/AIDS surveillance 2009 report is available here:
<http://ecdc.europa.eu>

Further information

More information on HIV/AIDS on our website:
<http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/healthtopics/aids/Pages/index.aspx>

Spotlight on HIV/AIDS: HIV testing – know, treat, prevent

<http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/healthtopics/spotlight/aids/Pages/index.aspx>

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The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is an EU agency tasked with identifying assessing and communicating threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. It supports the work of public health authorities in the EU and EEA/EFTA Member States.

ⁱ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe. HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2009. Stockholm: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; 2010.

ⁱⁱ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. HIV testing: increasing uptake and effectiveness in the European Union. Stockholm: ECDC; 2010; Hamers FF, Phillips AN. Diagnosed and undiagnosed HIV-infected populations in Europe. HIV Med. 2008;9 Suppl 2:6-12

ⁱⁱⁱ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe. HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2009. Stockholm: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; 2010.