To Avert an HIV Cluster, 4 Groups Join Together to Offer HIV Tests

The agencies in this West Virginia county hope to reach folks who inject drugs.

May 24, 2019 By Trent Straube

After 44 people in a neighboring county tested positive for HIV, mostly as a result of injection drug use, four organizations in West Virginia's Kanawha County are working together to offer HIV tests among their own at-risk individuals, reports the Charleston Gazette-Mail.

"We're trying to get in front of any problem, of stopping the possibility of that happening here and now," Ellen Allen, the executive director of Covenant House, told the newspaper.

Starting May 29, Covenant House will offer tests each Wednesday and give participants a $10 gift card. Anyone who tests positive for HIV will be connected to care and have access to mental health services and counseling.

Covenant House is partnering with Kanawha-Charleston Health Department, the West Virginia Health Right and Charleston Area Medical Center's Ryan White Program, all of which already offer HIV screenings.

Health Right said its clinic had performed 262 HIV tests in the past five weeks and only one was positive.

Although Allen told the paper the county hasn't seen an uptick in HIV cases, she says there's no reason to believe that couldn't change. "The number one thing we can do to prevent an outbreak or a cluster is let people know their status—we need testing wherever we can get it," Allen said. "People can't be afraid to know; we need to make it as easy as possible."

What's more, Allen said, it's important to reach people who inject drugs because that has been the leading route of transmissions and clusters in the state.

In fact, according to a related story in the newspaper, that population is likely now at even higher risk of HIV because the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department closed its syringe exchange in March 2018. At the time, it was serving more than 400 people a week in the mostly rural community.

A study by Johns Hopkins University on the suspension of the needle exchange program found that its former clients now reuse and share old syringes, they have less access to meds that reverse opioid overdoses, they feel abandoned by their community and they are less likely to be tested for HIV.

The exchange was shuttered after it became a point of contention during last fall’s election and the outgoing mayor linked it to increasing crime.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/avert-hiv-cluster-4-groups-join-together-offer-hiv-tests