



Guess Which State Leads the Nation in New HIV Cases

Hint: It's perfect timing for the EPIC Sexual Health Center to open in the Tampa Bay area.

July 23, 2021

Florida reported that nearly 4,400 people tested positive for HIV in 2019, more new diagnoses than any other state, [according to the Tampa Bay Times](#). The figure is based on the most recent HIV data available from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#).

In terms of infection rates—the average number of people diagnosed with [HIV](#) in 2019 for every 100,000 residents—Florida was third in the nation, with 23.7 HIV cases per 100,000 people. The Sunshine State followed Washington, DC, which had the highest rate in the nation at 42.2 HIV cases per 100,000 residents, and Georgia, with 27.6. The national average was 13.2, according to the CDC's [HIV Surveillance Report for 2019](#).

Although the number of new HIV diagnoses in Florida was high, the 2019 total was 300 fewer than the 4,700 cases recorded in 2016. HIV advocates are concerned that the number of HIV transmissions continues to climb while fewer people are getting tested because of [COVID-19](#) shutdowns.

The federal initiative “Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America” [lists 48 counties](#) in the nation plus Washington, DC, and San Juan, Puerto Rico, that together account for 50% of new HIV cases, with the goal of targeting resources to those areas. The following seven counties in Florida are on the list:

- Broward County
- Duval County
- Hillsborough County
- Miami-Dade County

- Orange County
- Palm Beach County
- Pinellas County.

The Tampa Bay Times spoke with HIV advocates in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, which are part of the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metropolitan area. They worry that the general population is not aware of its HIV risk and not getting tested and that the state is failing to promote the daily tablet known as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention. Taken by HIV-negative people at risk for the virus, PrEP is about 99% effective among men who have sex with men and 88% to 90% among heterosexual men and women (though researchers believe the latter number is likely higher). For more details, see “[How Well Do U=U and PrEP Work? The CDC Updates Its Answers.](#)”

Nearly 120,000 Florida residents are considered good candidates for PrEP, but, as the newspaper reports, a recent study found that only 8% of them were taking the daily med.



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Perhaps the July 12 opening of an [EPIC Sexual Health Center in St. Petersburg](#) will help tackle

some of these challenges. This new center joins four other EPIC (Empath Partners in Care) centers in the Tampa Bay region. The centers provide testing for HIV, hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs); PrEP education and prescriptions, along with post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP); counseling; case management; housing assistance; pregnancy testing and birth control; partner notification services; and educational and safer-sex workshops geared toward LGBTQ health.



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In related news, PrEP access just got easier thanks to federal guidance from the Biden administration. For details, read “[Insurers Must Cover PrEP and Related Services to Prevent HIV.](#)”

To learn more about “Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America,” the federal initiative to lower new HIV rates 75% by 2025 and 90% by 2030, [read an overview at HIV.gov](#) and [visit the official webpage at HRSA.org](#). For a related POZ article, see “[Plans to End the HIV Epidemic at Home and Abroad.](#)”

For a collection of HIV-related articles about the Sunshine State, click the hashtag [#Florida](#).