Unique Ways to Learn Your HIV Status During COVID-19

Georgia gets revved up about drive-through HIV testing. Some folks in Florida can pick up free at-home tests.

June 26, 2020 By Trent Straube

As this year's National HIV Testing Day approaches Saturday, June 27, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans might second-guess visiting their local clinic to find out their HIV status (assuming it's even open during these quarantine times). But health care workers and AIDS advocates are meeting today's challenges so folks can get tested where they feel safe and comfortable. Here are two unique examples.

The health department of Chatham County, Georgia—home to Savannah—will offer drive-through HIV testing from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday in its parking lot at 1395 Eisenhower Drive; no appointment is needed.

Test results are ready in a minute and are confidential. Counseling is available, as is information about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), the daily tablet that prevents HIV-negative people from contracting the virus. Plus: The event includes free gift cards and giveaways!

For those in Savannah who prefer to get tested at a clinic, the health department is operating several locations; appointments are preferred. For more information, visit GACHD.org.

Anyone in the United States can locate the nearest HIV testing site by entering your city, state or ZIP code at Locator.HIV.gov.

Meanwhile, the Florida Health Department in Escambia County—home to Pensacola and abutting Alabama—is giving out free at-home HIV tests to people who prefer to undergo testing in the privacy of their own homes.

HIV testing is a vital part of the federal initiative titled "Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America." Launched by President Trump last year, its goal is to lower HIV rates nationwide by 75% in five years and by 90% in 10 years—though one wonders how the administration's efforts to dismantle the Affordable Care Act and allow health care discrimination against LGBT people will help meet the initiative's goals.

One aspect that isn't controversial is the need for people to know their status. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), of the estimated 1.2 million people living with HIV in the United States, one in seven (14%) are unaware of their status.

Knowing your status is important because if you're positive, you can get on treatment that will help you stay healthy longer. What's more, when people with HIV take meds and maintain a suppressed viral load, they can't transmit the virus sexually, even when condoms aren't used. This fact is referred to as undetectable equals untransmittable, or U=U.

The theme of this year's National HIV Testing Day is "Knowing." Find out more in this POZ article about NHTD. And for more general information, read the POZ Basics on HIV Testing.

In related news, read "How Well Do U=U and PrEP Work? The CDC Updates Its Answers" and check out the March 2019 POZ cover story "Understanding Undetectable Equals Untransmittable" and its companion feature, "Viral Load Does Not Equal Value."

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