



Department
of Health



Public Health
England



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To: NHS Medical Directors
GPs and primary care teams

NATIONAL HIV TESTING WEEK – 22-29 NOVEMBER 2013

I am writing to give you advance notice about National HIV Testing Week. This 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.

During this important initiative, which started last year, the 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.


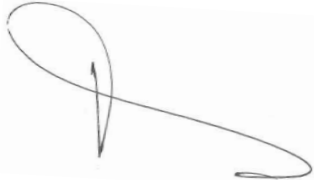

For those diagnosed in time in the UK, the vast majority of people living with HIV can expect a near normal life expectancy thanks to the benefits of effective treatment and the excellent care provided by the NHS. Early diagnosis also allows people to make behavioural changes, including using condoms,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

The British HIV Association 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, or non-specific symptoms such as malaise or weight-loss. 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 findings from pilot studies funded by the Department of Health¹ indicate that healthcare professionals offering an HIV test is acceptable to the public.

Offering an HIV test is within the competence of all healthcare professionals and there is no requirement to offer lengthy pre-test counselling. Giving an HIV- positive result to a patient should be within the competence of all doctors, just as it is for any serious health condition.

¹ Health Protection Agency 2012 – Evidence and resources to commission expanded HIV testing in priority medical services in high prevalence areas. April 2012

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 Health² and through guidelines produced by the British HIV Association³. 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 <http://www.medfash.org.uk/publications> Tackling HIV Testing Resource Pack, HIV in Primary Care

³ <http://www.bhiva.org/HIVTesting2008.aspx>