To: Local Newspaper

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RE: National HIV Testing Day

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National HIV Testing Day is an annual event meant to raise awareness of the importance of knowing one’s HIV status and encourage at risk individuals to receive an HIV test. The Central Michigan District Health Department is offering HIV testing at no charge. (See testing dates below).

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. This is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). HIV is different from most other viruses because it attacks the immune system. The immune system gives our bodies the ability to fight infections. HIV finds and destroys a type of white blood cell (T cells or CD4 cells) that the immune system must have to fight diseases.

Scientists identified a type of chimpanzee in West Africa as the source of HIV infection in humans. The virus most likely jumped to humans when humans hunted these chimpanzees for meat and came into contact with their infected blood. Over several years, the virus slowly spread across Africa, and later into other parts of the world. HIV was first identified in the United States in 1981, after a number of men started getting sick with a rare type of cancer. It took several years for scientists to develop a test for the virus, to understand how HIV was transmitted between humans, and to determine what people could do to protect themselves.
HIV is spread through any sexual contact with an infected individual, through sharing needles with someone who has the virus, or through an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, during the birth process, or while breastfeeding.

After an exposure to the virus, it may take up to three to six months for the virus to be detected on an HIV test. It is important for individuals to know their status to protect their health and the health of others. Our goal is to help stop the spread of HIV through testing and counseling, and those that are infected to receive appropriate medical care and information on how to prevent the spread to others. When a person knows their status he/she will not be putting others at risk of infection, and we can then decrease the number of new HIV infections throughout the world.

The ways one can protect themselves from becoming infected is: to know their own status, use appropriate methods of prevention when engaging in activities that may expose them, and to help educate others and encourage them to be tested.

Every 9 ½ minutes (on average), someone in the United States is infected with HIV. The Centers for Disease Control states more than 1 million people in the United States are living with HIV, and of those 1 million people, 1 out of 5 do not know they are infected. By testing, people can find out if they are infected or not, and take control of their health. There are benefits to finding out if you are infected because the sooner someone receives medical care it increases the chances of staying healthier longer. Medications are available today to slow down the progression of the disease and enhance the quality of life, but despite these therapies, people with HIV still develop AIDS. More than 14,000 people with AIDS still die each year in the United States.

HIV infection crosses into every color, age, nationality, race, etc. From 2003 through 2006, the estimated number of newly diagnosed HIV/AIDS cases decreased among children less than 14 years of age and increased in the 15 through 65 year age group. In 2006, the largest number of HIV/AIDS cases occurred among persons age 40-44 years.
The Central Michigan District Health Department has received a grant from the Michigan Department of Community Health to offer Case Management services. Case Management is for those infected with HIV/AIDS and their families. The service covers: HIV/AIDS specific medical care and treatment with Dr. Peter Gulick, medications, prescriptions, nutritional services, education and supplements, counseling, transportation, referral for housing needs, utilities support, food assistance, budgeting resources, assistance with medical coverage and medication coverage program, limited dental care, community resource referrals, substance abuse referrals, home and office visits, support group, laboratory services, pharmaceutical support and coordination with primary care physician. The program is housed in the Clare County office, located in Harrison, Michigan.

Please participate in HIV testing day and know your status. We can’t do it alone. You may test confidentially or anonymously. Call the Isabella County office at 989-773-5921 ext. 8409, Clare County Office at 989-539-6731 ext 8211, and the Osceola County office at 231-832-5532 ext. 8511 to schedule a test. Testing dates are as follows:

Clare County-Tuesday, June 23rd, Isabella County-Wednesday, June 24th and Thursday, June 25th, Osceola County –Friday, June 26th.

This article has been brought to you by the Central Michigan District Health Department serving the residents of Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola, and Roscommon counties.

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Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

Michigan HIV News
www.mihivnews.com