

HEALTH ALERT: LOCAL HIV INFECTIONS INCREASE

Have you been tested?

November 28, 2023 – The Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance (NMPHA) and District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) are encouraging residents to get tested due to an increase in HIV cases. This increase was determined by comparing a recent report where data spanning 2019-23 was compared to data from 2014-18.

From 2019-2023, new HIV diagnoses increased 2.5 times from those from 2014-2018 —from 14 to 44 in this region, which includes Kalkaska, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford Counties, as well as the counties of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, Otsego, Grand Traverse, Benzie, and Leelanau counties.

"We are certainly paying attention to this increase, but there's no cause for alarm," said DHD#10 Health Officer Kevin Hughes. "We have done a lot of work to increase HIV testing, education, and awareness in our communities and hope that we continue to link folks with the treatment and resources they need."

Testing is Crucial

This increase highlights the need for earlier diagnosis and the recommendation that everyone aged 15 to 65 years should be screened for HIV infection. Many of those recently diagnosed did not know about HIV testing or the availability of medication that can be prescribed to prevent or control the spread of HIV, a situation being address by the local health departments throughout NMPHA's 31-county, local region.

"There are medications that can be taken daily to reduce the risk of getting HIV and to treat HIV infections," says DHD#10 Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse. "These preventative medications reduce the risk of contracting HIV from sex by 99% and from injection drug use by at least 74%. We encourage people who may have identified risks for HIV to determine if they can benefit from this preventative approach in addition to taking measures such as using condoms."

"In addition to prevention, we encourage people to get tested, especially if they've never been screened for HIV," says DHD#10 Family Health Clinical Co-Director Sheila Parker. "DHD#10 offers rapid testing which means that clients can schedule an appointment and have their results before leaving our office. Or, clients can visit our website and order at-home test kits, which can be mailed directly to them."

What's Involved

DHD#10 offers HIV rapid tests at its clinics, as well as free mail-order HIV testing kits (<https://www.dhd10.org/sexualhealth>). The HIV rapid test involves a sampling of blood from a finger poke. As soon as the rapid results are in, a medical professional discusses them privately. The process and outcome are confidential.

If the test is positive, follow-up blood work is done to double-check the outcome. Appointments may be easily made by calling our local schedulers at 888-217-3904.

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