



Sarasota County Health Department | Florida Department of Health
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Media contact: Dianne Shipley, 941-861-2852; cell 941-302-1058;
Dianne_Shipley@doh.state.fl.us

Free HIV testing offered in Venice and Sarasota for national HIV testing campaign

Free HIV testing will be available to the public from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Thursday, June 30, at the Walgreens store, 1490 U.S. Highway 41 Bypass South (corner of U.S. 41 and Center Road) in Venice. This special opportunity is part of the national HIV testing campaign. In addition to HIV, testing and screening will be available that day for syphilis, gonorrhea, blood pressure, glucose (blood sugar) and cholesterol. Sponsoring organizations of this event include the HIV AIDS Network of Sarasota County (HANS), the Sarasota County Health Department, the Community AIDS Network and Walgreens. For more information on the Venice event, contact Serena Miller at 941-366-0461.

The Sarasota County Health Department also regularly offers testing at no charge on a walk-in basis for four sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV. Testing is provided at the health department's downtown Sarasota location at 2200 Ringling Blvd. from 1-4 p.m. Mondays, 8:30 a.m.-noon Wednesdays, and 1-6 p.m. Thursdays. For more information on the Sarasota testing events, contact Gary Ervin at 941-861-2919. Health officials note that this year marks the 30th year since the start of the AIDS pandemic.

Despite advances in testing and treatment, many people who are HIV positive still do not even know it. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one out of five people living with HIV in the United States are unaware of their HIV status. "Early diagnosis is the key," said Valerie Wojciechowicz, a Sarasota resident who educates and advocates for women living with HIV. "When I learned that I was HIV positive over 20 years ago, I made positive lifestyle changes. Today, my quality of life is good even with HIV, in part because of the early diagnosis and treatment."

The risk factors for HIV infection are having unprotected sex and sharing needles or syringes. If persons have never been tested, or had unprotected sex or shared a needle since their last test, now is the time to get an HIV test. Knowing their HIV status can help them get into a medical treatment earlier, take steps to stay healthy, and keep from spreading the virus to others.

HIV testing is fast and easy. The Clearview® HIV Test, done with a finger prick, provides preliminary test results in only five minutes. This testing will be available at the special testing event at Walgreens. The Rapid OraQuick HIV Test, also done with a finger prick, provides preliminary test results in 20 minutes, is routinely used at the walk-in testing clinic at the Sarasota County Health Department's downtown Sarasota location.

Test results are always kept private and are not shared with anyone, including family members, significant others, employers or landlords. Local health department officials offer the following recommendations to reduce risk for HIV infection:

Be safe: The best way to prevent HIV is to abstain from having sex. If you do have sex, use a new condom every time. Do not share needles or syringes for any reason, whether to inject drugs (recreational or medical) or for tattoos and body piercing.

Talk about it: Talk about sex and HIV with your partners. Find out when they were last tested for HIV and what their status was. HIV is primarily spread through four fluids -- semen, vaginal fluids, blood and breast milk.

Talk to your doctor: If you are sexually active, you should get tested for HIV at least once. Do not assume your doctor will ask you to be tested for HIV. Women who test positive should get treatment during all pregnancies and not breastfeed their babies.

Locally, the HIV/AIDS Network of Southwest Florida works to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS at the grass-roots community level. The group meets monthly to coordinate HIV/AIDS prevention and outreach services throughout the region. For more information on HIV testing opportunities throughout the year, call 941-861-5000 or visit the HANS website at www.hivсарasota.org.

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