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### **On World AIDS Day, Oregon state health officials encourage testing**

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Oregon state health officials are taking World AIDS Day, Dec. 1, as an opportunity to encourage all adults to be tested for the virus that causes AIDS.

Dr. Sean Schafer, M.D., medical epidemiologist with the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division's HIV/STD/TB Program, said voluntary, confidential testing of all adults for the human immunodeficiency virus would be highly effective in preventing new infections.

"About 25 percent of people who carry HIV/AIDS don't yet know they're infected," Schafer said. "About half of all new infections are transmitted by people who don't know they're infected. Just the knowledge that one is infected leads to approximately a 67 percent reduction in the risky sex that can transmit the virus. That's why testing is so important."

More than 7,000 Oregonians are living with HIV/AIDS in 2008, Schafer said. That number includes an estimated 1,500 people who are infected but don't yet know it.

"Oregon is fortunate to have a very good system of HIV care and services and is able to facilitate care for everyone who needs or wants it," he said. "Now the goal is to lower the number of people who caught HIV/AIDS because a partner didn't know he or she was a carrier."

Dr. Mel Kohn, acting director of the Oregon State Health Division, sees HIV/AIDS as a continuing challenge.

“As we face the 27th year since AIDS was first recognized in the U.S., preventing HIV infection continues to be an important public health challenge here in Oregon,” Kohn said.

About 300 Oregonians will acquire HIV infection during 2008 and 100 people will die from the effects of the virus.

One important focus for prevention is on men younger than 25 who have sex with other men. During 2006 and 2007 reported cases of HIV/AIDS in Oregon increased among men in that group, suggesting the need for even more effective public health strategies that lead to safer sex.

Early detection of the virus also can lead to earlier treatment, which can greatly prolong the lives of those who are infected.

Forty percent of people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in Oregon and in the rest of the U.S. have AIDS or progress to AIDS within 12 months of their diagnosis. Because it takes seven to 10 years to progress to AIDS after HIV infection, there is a long span of time when the virus can be unknowingly transmitted.

Schafer suggests several ways to reduce the risk of acquiring and transmitting the virus:

- Make it a point to get tested for HIV at least once, more frequently if you have multiple or new sex partners or have a sex partner who is infected or at risk for HIV.
- Inquire about the HIV status of partners or prospective partners; encourage them to be tested.
- Know your HIV status and tell your sex or drug-use partners.
- Use condoms during sex until you are in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner you know is not infected. Don't assume someone is not infected -- urge them to be tested. You can't tell by looking.
- Talk with your doctor, health advisor or local health department or call the Oregon AIDS/STD Hotline (800-777-AIDS) to learn about ways you can reduce your risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS.

Schafer sees significance in this year's World AIDS Day theme: “Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise.”

“We're making a promise to all those Oregonians who are infected or have died of HIV to prevent as many future infections as possible,” he said.

One such effort is to use a twice-monthly Health Division publication to encourage physicians to test all of their adult patients in offices, clinics and emergency rooms. The publication, called "CD Summary," goes out this week.

Among World AIDS Day events in Portland will be the Portland Area Global AIDS Coalition Free Action Fair and Guest Speaker from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Tiffany Center, 1410 SW Morrison St. The fair, which is free, is followed by a benefit for the Portland-Mutare Sister City/Africa AIDS Response from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is \$25.

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