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Health Alert: Local HIV Infections Increase

Have you been tested?

There is an increase in the number of HIV diagnoses occurring locally—and Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance (NMPHA) and Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department (BLDHD) are encouraging residents to be proactive and get tested. The noted increase was determined by comparing information collected from 2019-23 with data from 2014-18.

Over that time, HIV diagnoses increased 2.5 times of the average number—from 14 to 44 in this region, which includes Benzie and Leelanau counties, as well as the counties of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, Otsego, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Manistee, Wexford, and Missaukee counties.

Based on surveys, there are several other noteworthy factors in this troubling trend:

- 44% of the new diagnoses were diagnosed at stage 3 (stage 3 = AIDS diagnosis),
- 48% of the findings since 2021 were diagnosed this year, in 2023 (13 people),
- Only 4 of 27 new diagnoses since January 2021 have HIV testing history,
- 67% were diagnosed in the emergency room or during outpatient visits,
- Almost 41% do not have an identified risk, such as reported injection drug use, and
- 78% of the new diagnosis were among residents over 30 years of age, with the majority over 40.

Testing is Crucial

Further patient interviewing shows that those diagnosed did not know about HIV testing or the availability of medication that can be prescribed to prevent or control the spread of the disease, a situation being addressed by BLDHD.

“There are medications that can be taken daily to reduce the risk of getting HIV and to treat HIV infections,” says Dr. Joshua Meyerson, BLDHD Medical Director. “The preventative medications minimize 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 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 Michelle Klein, Director of Personal Health. “We offer rapid tests, which means that clients can schedule an appointment and have their results before leaving our office.”

What’s Involved

BLDHD offers HIV rapid tests at our clinics. The 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 231-882-4409.

When scheduling an appointment for HIV testing, residents may also be tested for other sexually transmitted infections. There is also a local increase in the number of infections for Hepatitis C, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis.

To get tested, the expedited process only takes between 30 and 45 minutes. A negative test means peace of mind and more prevention education. A positive test means earlier detection. These diseases are treatable.

Media Contact:
Rachel Pomeroy, PIO
231-882-6085
RPomeroy@bldhd.org

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