

Feb. 26, 2010

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MEDIA NOTE: The health department and other community based organizations that are part of the HIV/AIDS Network of Southwest Florida (HANS) will offer free educational and HIV testing events as part of the local observance of National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. A schedule of those offerings is at the end of this release.

It's time for women to get an HIV test

As HIV/AIDS continues to take a toll on women, it's never been more important for women to get an HIV test. The Sarasota County Health Department and other organizations that are part of the HIV/AIDS Network of Southwest Florida (HANS), urge women of all ages to take advantage of opportunities for free education and HIV testing during March. The theme of the fifth National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day observance on March 10 is "It's Time to Get Tested."

"This provides organizations that serve girls and women the opportunity to support, encourage discussion, and educate them about prevention, the importance of getting tested, and how to lead a normal, healthy life despite being infected," said Dr. Lisa Merritt, executive director of the Multicultural Institute, which developed the Gatekeepers of Community Health Project in Sarasota and Manatee counties.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), every 35 minutes a woman tests positive for HIV in the United States. Since HIV was first reported in the early 1980's, more and more women have become infected. Today, about one in four Americans living with HIV is a woman, and over half of all new HIV infections occur among black women — mothers, daughters, sisters, wives — between the ages of 19 and 35 according to the CDC. Some women are unaware of their male partner's risk factors for HIV infection, such as having unprotected sex with multiple partners, having sex with men or injecting drug users. Men who engage in sex with both men and women can acquire HIV from a male partner then spread the virus to their female partners.

HIV tests take only a few minutes with results being available in a few days to two weeks. Rapid HIV tests allow preliminary results in about 20 minutes.

"As women, we are so often the caregivers of our families and friends and we forget to take care of ourselves. Yet it is so important to take time to get medical care, especially if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. Knowing your HIV status can help you get into medical treatment earlier. It can also help you take steps to stay healthy, and keep from spreading the virus to others," said Merritt. "Test results are always kept private and are not shared with anyone, including family members, significant others, employers or landlords."

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, call 941-861-2900 or visit the HANS Web site at www.hivsarasota.org.

Free, locally-sponsored HIV testing opportunities are listed below:

HIV/AIDS Network of Southwest Florida 2010 Sarasota County Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day activities

SARASOTA

Wednesday, March 10; 5 – 7:30 p.m.

TruVine Baptist Church

1947 31st Street

Contact: Serena Miller, 941-366-0461

Sponsoring Agencies: Community AIDS Network, Multicultural Health Institute, Goodwill Industries, Children First, Genesis Health Services, Second Chance Last Opportunity, Healthy Start Coalition, ALSO, YMCA, HIV/AIDS Network of Southwest Florida

Wednesday, March 10; 6 – 7:30 p.m.

Greater Hurst Chapel AME

2730 N. Links Avenue

Contact: Bill Carter; 941-256-6620

Sponsoring Agencies: Genesis Health Services, Multicultural Health Institute

Thursday, March 11; 9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Salvation Army – Health In Motion Mobile Medical Unit

1400 Tenth Street

Contact: Sarasota County Call Center, 941-861-5000

Sponsoring Agency: Sarasota County Health Department

Thursday, March 11; 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

North Sarasota Library – Business and Professional Women of North Sarasota meeting

2801 Newtown Boulevard

Contact: Serena Miller, 941-366-0461

Sponsoring Agencies: Community AIDS Network, Multicultural Health Institute, Goodwill Industries, Children First, Genesis Health Services, Second Chance Last Opportunity, Healthy Start Coalition, ALSO, YMCA, HIV/AIDS Network of Southwest Florida

Friday, March 12; 1 - 5 p.m.

ALSO Out Youth

1470 Boulevard of the Arts

Contact: Stephen Warne, 941-951-2576

Sponsoring Agency: ALSO Out Youth

SISTA Play Performance – “Mind, Body, Soul”

Friday, March 12; 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Robert L. Taylor Community Center

1845 34th Street

Contact: April Glasco, 941-360-8660

Sponsoring Agencies: Community AIDS Network, Multicultural Health Institute, Goodwill Industries, Children First, Genesis Health Services, Second Chance Last Opportunity, Healthy Start Coalition, ALSO, YMCA, HIV/AIDS Network of Southwest Florida

Health Fair Event

Saturday, March 13; 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Selby Goodwill

1781 Martin Luther King Jr. Way

Contact: Serena Miller, 941-366-0461

Sponsoring Agencies: Community AIDS Network, Multicultural Health Institute, Goodwill Industries, Children First, Genesis Health Services, Second Chance Last Opportunity, Healthy Start Coalition, ALSO, YMCA, HIV/AIDS Network of Southwest Florida

VENICE

Wednesday, March 10; 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

South County Family Health Center

7820 S. Tamiami Trail, Building B

Contact: Terry Merrill, 941-861-3301

Sponsoring Agency: Sarasota County Health Department

NORTH PORT

Wednesday, March 10; 9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Wal-Mart Super Center – Health In Motion Mobile Medical Unit

17000 Tamiami Trail

Contact: Sarasota County Call Center, 941-861-5000

Sponsoring Agency: Sarasota County Health Department

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