



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

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HIV: Know Your HIV Status?

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Prevention and education are powerful tools in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, testing remains a controversial subject in many communities because of concerns about confidentiality and stigma associated with the disease. The unfortunate result is that many people do not know their HIV status, the disease spreads, and the epidemic continues. National HIV Testing Day on Friday, June 27, is a good opportunity for people to commit themselves to getting tested.

The US Centers for Disease Control recommends that HIV testing become a part of routine health care. HIV screening is recommended for all patients ages 13 to 64 in all health care settings. Persons at highest risk for HIV infection, such as those with multiple sex partners, should be screened for HIV at least annually. New rapid oral testing is available that provides results in 20 minutes using saliva, and requires no needles.

In 2006, the last year for which figures were available, there were 194 new HIV/AIDS cases in Boston, according to the Health of Boston report released last month. A majority of those cases involved residents in the South End.

To protect yourself and your partner, it is important to get tested regularly. Newly developed rapid testing processes are non-invasive, fast, and extremely accurate. For those who fear exposure to HIV, the sooner you know your status the sooner you can access quality and specialized care. Treatment options have advanced along with testing procedures, but are most successful when accessed early. Regular, routine testing can help ensure timely delivery of much needed medical care.

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National HIV Testing Day

To commemorate National HIV Testing Day on June 27, the Boston Public Health Commission is partnering with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) to distribute 500 rapid testing kits to five local community health organizations. The organizations will have extended hours on that day to conduct HIV rapid testing made possible by a donation of the kits from OraSure and the National Association of People With AIDS. All testing and counseling sessions are strictly confidential.

Information and Help

The Commission offers a full range of services and/or referrals. You can also call local community health centers or community-based organization for HIV counseling and testing information. For National HIV Testing Day, the Commission will partner with the following five agencies for free rapid oral testing:

AIDS Action Committee	(617) 437-6200
Codman Square Health Center	(617) 825-9660
Fenway Community Health Center	(617) 267-0900
Sidney Borum Health Center (JRI)	(617) 451-8140
Latino Health Institute	(617) 350-6900

Websites:

http://www.bphc.org/bphc/aids_supportservices.asp

<http://www.gettestedboston.org>

<http://www.HIVtest.org>

<http://www.AAC.org/Hotline>