

25 November 2013

ENDING HIV- Everything has changed

As part of World AIDS Day 2013, observed globally on 1 December, the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) is supporting a series of events to increase community awareness about HIV.

Dr Lynne Wray, Acting Director of Sydney Sexual Health Centre, said that through the remarkable advances in testing and treatment, and continued promotion of safe behaviour, we now have the means to virtually eliminate the transmission of HIV by 2020.

However, in 2012, there was a concerning rise in HIV notifications in NSW, with 409 new diagnoses in NSW residents, compared with 330 in 2011.

Dr Wray said it was critical to test more, treat early and stay safe.

“The most effective way for people to protect themselves and their partners in reducing the spread of HIV is to consistently use condoms with sexual partners and have regular HIV and STI testing,” she said.

“More of us need to get tested more often. Testing is faster and easier than ever before and it’s confidential. The earlier you know your HIV status, and the quicker you see a doctor, the better your outlook.”

Dr Wray said treatment today is now simpler with fewer side effects.

“Antiviral treatment not only improves health and life expectancy, but also dramatically reduces the risk of passing on HIV,” she said.

“Safe is the way to play. Use condoms, always use sterile injecting equipment, and be extra careful in risky situations. An HIV diagnosis is no longer a death sentence, but it still has lifelong consequences that vary from person to person.

“Another key area is community attitudes and their impact on HIV and people living with the virus.”

SESLHD events include:

- Twenty10 Red Makeovers – A workshop in Chippendale for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA) Young People including an information sessions on HIV with a Positive Speaker from Positive Life. Participants engage in red makeovers!
- Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre and the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby will host free screening of the documentary "How to survive a plague". The location is poignant given the centre is located where the early mobilisation efforts by affected communities around HIV/AIDS and social justice took place. The event includes a Positive Speaker from Positive Life and a facilitated discussion to promote reflection on issues related to the New Era in HIV treatment and testing; and ongoing issues of stigma and discrimination.

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

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- Paint the Town Red - across NSW buildings being lit red to show support for WAD. City of Sydney Council are again lighting Sydney Town Hall with Red Ribbon projections and frontline council staff will be wearing red ribbons to show support.
- A Surry Hills Nursing Home run by Mission Australia is providing an HIV in service for staff to raise awareness, reduce stigma and discrimination. Will include Positive Speaker from Positive Life. Highlights the issue of people living with HIV ageing and need for services/ facilities to respond to needs of this group
- A freeze mob is being held in Martin Place on the 29th November 1-2pm. The freeze mob will move about Martin Place freezing as a mob in various poses holding signs with awareness messages.
- An HIV Testing Card has been developed by the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District's HIV/AIDS and Related Programs Unit. The card lists clinics in the local area that provide HIV testing, with contact details and opening hours. The cards are available free from local venues as part of the World AIDS Day 2013.
- SESLHD is also supporting Australia's first pop up HIV rapid testing site in Sydney's Taylor Square.

Dr Wray said that HIV affects people of all ages, genders and cultures; with 14% of notifications in 2012 from heterosexual contact.

"Up to 15,000 people are estimated to be living with the virus in NSW," she said.

For more information visit www.health.nsw.gov.au/endinghiv

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