

***Take the Test. Take Control* Public Health Campaign Recommends HIV Testing Across Rural Minnesota**

Rapid Test offers results in 20 minutes

Nearly 25 Percent of HIV positive individuals unaware of infection and spreading the virus.

Little Falls, Minn. -- Rural AIDS Action Network (RAAN), the nonprofit organization working to raise awareness and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in Greater Minnesota, is encouraging at-risk rural Minnesotans to receive free, confidential HIV testing and counseling, as part of the *Take The Test. Take Control* public health campaign.

The awareness and prevention campaign is part of the June 27th National HIV Testing Day initiative, which informs the public that virtually anyone can be at risk of contracting HIV, depending on their lifestyle and behaviors.

Take The Test. Take Control

To determine your risk factors for contracting HIV, please visit www.raan.org. RAAN has established a **toll-free hotline – 800-966-9735** – to schedule a free, confidential HIV test and to receive information about HIV prevention.

“In rural Minnesota, nearly 25 percent of individuals are unaware of their HIV infection, and they may be symptom-free for up to a decade, continuing to unknowingly infect others,” said RAAN Executive Director Charles Hempeck. “We’re asking at-risk men and women to take responsibility for their health and the health of others. Testing is quick, free, and confidential.”

RAAN is now using a new test that provides results within 20 minutes. A swab is taken of the subject’s cheek. A line appears on the test stick indicating either reactive or non-reactive results based on the presence or absence of HIV antibodies.

If an individual is HIV positive, quick access to appropriate medical care can lead to better outcomes. It takes only minutes to receive HIV test results. And, new HIV/AIDS treatments can significantly enhance the quality and length of life. Years ago, an individual would take 20 to 30 pills a day. Current treatment options could be as little as few pills a day,” Hempeck explains.

Testing and education also helps people who test *negative* get the information they need to stay uninfected.

HIV Infection Rate among Young Men and Minorities

Hempeck says Rural AIDS Action Network is especially interested in reaching higher risk communities with the HIV testing and prevention message.

“We are reaching out to communities at increased risk of HIV infection, including African American, Latino and young male populations, all of which are disproportionately affected with HIV when compared to other demographic groups in Minnesota and the United States.”

Health officials noted the increases seen among males, ages 13 to 24, where cases have more than doubled since 2001. There were only 18 new cases reported in 2001 compared with 42 cases in this age group in 2008. From 2006-2008 all the young men in this category, where risk behavior was available, reported sex with another male as a factor for exposure.

Infection rates are higher among communities of color when compared to whites. About 38 percent of all new cases reported in 2008 were among men of color. Statewide rates for African Americans and Latinos are nearly 10 and five times greater, respectively, than whites. Rates for African communities are over 24 times greater than for whites.

Approximately 14 percent of Minnesota HIV/AIDS cases are in rural areas, compared with 8 percent nationally.

Because of the growing, and increasingly diverse, number of HIV/AIDS cases being seen, RAAN serves all of Greater Minnesota through offices in Little Falls, Mankato, Bemidji, Moorhead, Alexandria, Hibbing and Mora.

For more information about RAAN and the comprehensive services it provides throughout rural Minnesota, please visit www.raan.org.

The Rural AIDS Action Network (RAAN) is a nonprofit, community-based organization whose mission is to organize, develop and sustain caring communities of professionals and volunteers that serve and support persons living with, affected by, or at risk for HIV/AIDS in rural Minnesota.