

INCREASED HIV DIAGNOSES IN KALKASKA COUNTY

July 12, 2021 – District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) was recently made aware of an alarming increase in HIV diagnoses in Kalkaska County dating back to 2019. Kalkaska County is typically a low morbidity jurisdiction and in the ten years prior to 2019 there were, on average, less than one new diagnosis per year.

HIV, human immunodeficiency virus, weakens the immune system by destroying disease-fighting cells. In 2019, the rate of HIV diagnoses in Kalkaska County was four times greater than the overall rate of new diagnoses in Michigan and slightly less than three times the rate in the Detroit metropolitan area (DMA) which includes Lapeer, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, and Wayne Counties. Additionally, the HIV transmission rate (HTR) in Kalkaska County, which is the rate of new transmission that occurred per 100 people living with HIV, was approximately ten times greater than what we observed statewide and the in DMA.

A rate is a count compared to an underlying population (normally 100,000). Rates allow comparisons to be made across geographic groups. The new HIV diagnosis rate is calculated via the following methodology: for every 100,000 people in a population, the number of new HIV diagnoses during a given year

The HTR is a measure used to help identify which communities have higher or lower new diagnosis rates than expected. High HTRs are an indication of differing underlying factors in a community, such as the possibility of a large number of undiagnosed individuals, access to care may have changed, there was a testing event, etc.

“It was very concerning to learn of this increase in cases of HIV, especially in such a small county already identified in 2017 to be at risk for hepatitis C or HIV outbreak,” stated DHD#10 Medical Director, Dr. Jennifer Morse. “This just underscores that these risks are real and our need for testing, prevention, and harm reduction are urgent. Every adult should be tested for HIV at least once in their life, and more often if they have higher risks. HIV is very treatable now, and it is even preventable with medication. If it is diagnosed early, you can expect to live the same lifespan as anyone else. That is why is so important to get tested.”

People can get or transmit HIV through specific activities, such as through sex or injection drug use. HIV can only be transmitted in certain body fluids from a person who has HIV, including blood, semen, pre-seminal fluids, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids, and breast milk.

Anyone can get HIV, but you can take the following steps to protect yourself:

- **Get tested for HIV.** Talk to your partner about HIV testing and get tested before you have sex. Use this [testing locator](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to find an HIV testing location near you or call your local health department.
- **Choose less risky sexual behaviors.** HIV is mainly spread by having anal or vaginal sex without a condom or without taking medicines to prevent or treat HIV.



MEDIA CONTACT

Jeannine Taylor
Public Information Officer
O: 231-876-3823
C: 231-920-4998
E: jtaylor@dhd10.org



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- **Use condoms every time you have sex.** Read [this fact sheet](#) from CDC on how to use condoms correctly. Order free condoms online by filling out this [confidential order form](#) and DHD#10 will mail them right to you.
- **Limit your number of sexual partners.** The more partners you have, the more likely you are to have a partner with poorly controlled HIV or to have a partner with a [sexually transmitted disease](#) (STD). Both of these factors can increase the risk of HIV transmission.
- **Get tested and treated for STDs.** Insist that your partners get tested and treated, too. Having an STD can increase your risk of getting HIV or spreading it to others.
- **Talk to your health care provider about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).** PrEP is an HIV prevention option for people who don't have HIV but who are at risk of getting HIV. PrEP involves taking a specific HIV medicine every day to reduce the risk of getting HIV through sex or injection drug use. For more information, read the [Clinical Info fact sheet](#) on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).
- **Don't inject drugs.** But if you do, use only sterile drug injection equipment and -water and never share your equipment with others. Find a [syringe service program](#) near you.

DHD#10 offers confidential HIV/STD testing at low or no cost. Contact us at **888-217-3904** to schedule an appointment.

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