

News release

European HIV Testing Week is renamed to European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week to mark the inclusion of viral hepatitis testing in 2015

Tuesday 28 July 2015, Copenhagen: Today, HIV in Europe announces the inclusion of viral hepatitis testing in European HIV Testing Week. The announcement coincides with World Hepatitis Day 2015 and aims to encourage hepatitis community groups from across Europe to sign-up to participate in the 2015 testing week activities – moving forward the week will be known as European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week.

This year, European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week will take place from 20-27 November. HIV in Europe is asking for communities to unite to increase awareness of the benefits of HIV and viral hepatitis testing and campaign for access to treatment in order to prevent further transmissions throughout Europe – which is why the theme for 2015 is **TEST. TREAT. PREVENT.**

Prof. Dr. Jürgen Rockstroh, Co-Chair of the HIV in Europe initiative, said: ‘HIV and viral hepatitis co-infection is a huge problem across Europe, we have expanded the scope of testing week to include viral hepatitis following requests from community organisations. These viruses are transmitted in similar ways and affect similar groups of people so it makes clinical sense to get tested for both HIV and hepatitis at the same time. We hope that the community makes the 2015 testing week as successful as previous years.’

30-50% of the 2.2 million people living with HIV in Europe are unaware that they are HIV positive; and 50% of those who are positive are diagnosed late, delaying access to treatment. It is estimated that around 13.3 million people are living with hepatitis B in Europe and approximately 15-40% of infected patients will develop cirrhosis, liver failure or hepatocellular carcinoma. Around 15 million people are living with hepatitis C in Europe, yet only 3.5% receive treatment on average.

Brian West, Co-Chair of the HIV in Europe initiative and steering committee member of AIDS Action Europe said: ‘With the support of participating organisations, European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week aims to communicate the benefits of testing, because today people living with HIV can live into their older-years with early treatment; and those with hepatitis C can be cured. Early treatment also helps to prevent further transmissions to others.

'We hope that testing week proves to be even more successful this year and today we are calling for more organisations to sign up via the European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week website to help even more people find out if they are HIV and/or viral hepatitis positive or negative.'

Key facts:

- European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week will take place during the last week of November, 20-27 November 2015, and will be the third European testing week
- In 2013, 456 organisations from 47 of 53 countries in the WHO European Region participated
- In 2014, 709 organisations from 49 of 53 countries in the WHO European Region participated
- In 2014, HIV testing activities were carried out by 79% of participants and awareness raising activities by 77% of participants
- Nearly one fifth of the participants carrying out HIV testing activities reported a 200% increase or more in testing rates

Visit the European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week website for more information
www.testingweek.eu.

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Notes to editor

Those who ought to be getting tested

The testing week is targeted at populations at higher risk of HIV and viral hepatitis B & C. These groups include, but are not limited to: gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), migrants (including persons originating from a high prevalence country) and mobile populations, sex workers, prisoners and people who inject drugs.

The situation in Europe

The unacceptable reality is that 30-50% of the 2.2 million people living with HIV in Europe are unaware that they are HIV positive; and 50% of those who are positive are diagnosed late, delaying access to treatment. Hepatitis B and C affects around 28 million people and are both widely underestimated and underreported. Due to the lack of symptoms these infectious diseases are often referred to as the *silent epidemic*.

This means that many people are not being tested prior to symptoms emerging. This could be because there are barriers to requesting a test, barriers to offering a test or barriers to the implementation of existing European testing guidelines. This is despite the benefits of early diagnosis being well-documented.

When people are diagnosed late with HIV and/or hepatitis B & C, they are more likely to suffer with health complications and more likely to pass on the viruses to others, as they will not have had access to treatment. In contrast, the majority of those who are diagnosed early (soon after infection) and are prescribed antiretroviral treatment in a timely manner can live healthy lives and also become completely virus free if infected with hepatitis C. The benefits of regular testing amongst populations at higher risk are widespread – it leads to early diagnosis and access to treatment, which in turn has a positive impact on the individual's prognosis and reduces onward transmission.

The European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week provides a unique opportunity for non-governmental organisations, primary health clinics and hospitals to unite to reduce the number of people unaware of their HIV and viral hepatitis status.

***About HIV in Europe**

HIV in Europe is a pan-European initiative initiated in Brussels in 2007. The initiative provides a European platform for exchange and activities to improve early diagnosis and earlier care of HIV across Europe. The initiative is directed by an independent group of experts with representation from civil society, policy makers, health professionals and European public health institutions.

HIV in Europe is not an organisation, but an initiative formed to inform processes, share knowledge and improve the evidence base around important issues of earlier testing and care. It is unique in its collaboration between stakeholders at a clinical, advocacy and public health level.

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