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Late-Identified HIV Infection Leads to Preventable AIDS Deaths
- Early testing and treatment saves lives -

PENSACOLA – Delayed HIV testing is a leading cause of preventable AIDS deaths in northwest Florida (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton counties). During the last six months of 2009, 7% of people reported as AIDS cases in northwest Florida died within one month of being diagnosed.

“Many people seem to think that it is better not to know if they are HIV positive,” said Anita Lewis, Area 1 HIV/AIDS Program Coordinator for the Florida Health Department at Escambia County Health Department. “This is completely untrue. Individuals who know their HIV status can take steps to avoid transmitting the disease to others. Most importantly, they are able to enroll in care and receive treatments that can add years to their lives. It is imperative for people to know that being diagnosed as HIV positive is not a death sentence.”

HIV can be transmitted through unprotected sexual activity, drug use, or from a mother to her child. There are currently 2,657 people in Northwest Florida (Escambia to Walton County) that have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, and it is estimated that another 600 to 700 people are unaware that they are living with the disease because they have not been tested.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone be tested annually for HIV as part of a regular checkup. HIV testing is free, confidential, and widely accessible, with many testing sites offering results in 20 minutes. For more information on HIV testing, or to find a testing site near you, please contact the Area 1 HIV/AIDS Program office at the Escambia County Health Department at (850) 595-6345. Also attached is contact information for locations in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton counties where individuals can get free and confidential testing.

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