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HIV Testing for Older Adults and Gay Men Offered

PENSACOLA –The Escambia County Health Department urges individuals over age 50 and gay men to get HIV tested. In northwest Florida, 26 percent of all persons living with HIV are over 50 years of age and 45 percent of reported HIV cases are among gay men. “The only way to reduce the number of people infected with HIV is for every person to know their status and protect themselves,” said Jennifer Findley, HIV/AIDS program coordinator for Area 1 Florida.

By 2015, 50 percent of people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. will be in the over 50 age group, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sexually active older adults should get tested annually. However, because of their age, many older adults do not realize they may be at risk for HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases.

Findley explained that older adults often present in the late stages of the HIV disease at the time of their diagnoses, because they usually mistake their symptoms for those frequently associated with the aging process. Other times it may be because they are embarrassed to request an HIV test. Late diagnosis is associated with poorer health outcomes and more rapid disease progression.

The Bureau of HIV/AIDS recommends that gay men and their partners get tested every three to six months. “HIV screening should be part of routine healthcare for all persons regardless of age and sexual orientation,” Findley said. “If diagnosed early, the availability of effective antiretroviral medications can enhance the quality and length of a person’s life.”

This month, National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day is observed on the 18th and National Gay Men’s HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on the 27th.

For information on free HIV testing sites, call 850.595.0260. Several community HIV testing sites now offer free rapid HIV testing with preliminary results available in as little as 20 minutes. Individuals may also request HIV testing through their physician.

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