



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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SANTA CRUZ COUNTY COMMEMORATES 35TH WORLD AIDS DAY

Santa Cruz, Calif.– December 1st, 2023 marks the 35th annual World AIDS Day. The theme of this year's observance is "**Remember and Commit**," and pays tribute to all our community has lost to HIV/AIDS.

More than 32 million people have died worldwide from AIDS-related illness, which is why it is important to create awareness and improve access to screening, prevention, and early treatment to prevent new infections. HIV infections are preventable and people living with HIV can have long, meaningful lives when receiving medical care.

Through biomedical interventions, HIV infections can be prevented. PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, can prevent individuals from contracting HIV by taking a medicine before they are in contact with HIV. People living with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load, by taking and adhering to their medications as prescribed, cannot sexually transmit HIV to others.

"The only way to know your HIV status is to get tested. Knowing your status gives you powerful information to keep you and your partner healthy," said Eliko Bridgewater, Santa Cruz County Public Health Nurse. "Even if both you and your partner are having sex only with each other, you should both find out your HIV status."

The CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 get tested for HIV at least once as part of routine health care, and more often if you have increased risk factors such as having more than one sexual partner since your last HIV test, having sex

with someone who's sexual history you don't know, and some sexually active gay and bisexual men.

While great strides have been made over the four decades since the first known reported case of AIDS, this virus remains a public health challenge, particularly with the disparities in access to screenings, prevention services, treatment, and stigma among communities of color.

Public Health of Santa Cruz County offers targeted testing services, linkage to care and works with community partners to increase awareness of preventative services. Early diagnosis is the first step to linking people to treatment and reducing new HIV infections. Make HIV screening a part of routine care and help end the HIV epidemic.

For HIV case management and preventative services, please visit:

CARe Team Integrated Services

Website: <http://bit.ly/CareTeamHIV>

Phone Number: (831) 454-4730

Hours: Monday - Friday

8:00 AM - 5 PM

Contact your primary care provider and ask about HIV testing.

Find HIV Testing Sites in Santa Cruz County: <https://bit.ly/SCCHIVTesting>

HIV Prevention Resources:

Local rapid testing: <http://bit.ly/CareTeamHIV>

To order a Free HIV self-test: <https://takemehome.org>

For no cost, confidential telemedicine for PrEP and PEP visit www.color.com/cust/ca-prep

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