

PRESS RELEASE

Strict embargo: 00.01hrs
Tuesday 29 November 2011



HIV testing increases in London but 8,400 are still unaware they are infected

HIV testing has increased significantly over a four year period in London but more than one in five (8,400/38,300) Londoners infected with HIV are unaware they have it, according to data released today (Tuesday 29 November) by the Health Protection Agency (HPA).

In 2010, 426,000 people took up the offer of an HIV test at London GUM and antenatal clinics. This is an increase of 35% since 2006 (317,000).

Londoners accounted for nearly half (47%) of all people newly diagnosed with HIV in England in 2010 (2,891/6,108) and the same proportion of those receiving care for HIV (29,738/63,901).

HPA analysis suggests that HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men (MSM) is now one in 20 in the UK but in London that figure is one in 11. Among new HIV diagnoses in London, sex between men is the most common route of transmission and this accounted for half of all new infections in London in 2010, with heterosexual contact representing 46%.

Dr Paul Crook, an expert in HIV trends for the HPA in London, said:

“HIV continues to be a major public health problem in London and it is concerning that an estimated one in five people infected with HIV are unaware that they have it. This means that people are missing out on the excellent treatment options available which, if started promptly, can lead to near normal life expectancy.

“It’s encouraging news that more people are accepting the offer of an HIV test in London. However, to ensure that even more people know their HIV status, we are recommending routine HIV testing for general hospital admissions and adult patients newly registering with a GP in areas of very high prevalence.

“Avoiding infection altogether is essential for controlling the HIV epidemic. Our advice to Londoners is to always use a condom before sex with any new or casual partner and to get tested regularly. People who are at higher risk of HIV, such as men who have sex with men, are advised to get tested for HIV at least annually. Being aware of your HIV status will improve your survival and reduce the risk of transmission to partners.”

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Notes to editors:

1. HIV in the UK report - the Health Protection Agency's 'HIV in the United Kingdom: 2010 report' will be available on the HPA's website from Tuesday 29 November.
2. In 2010, 29 Local Authorities in London had a prevalence of diagnosed HIV greater than 2 per 1,000 which is the recommended threshold for widening HIV testing in the local population. These are listed at the following link: www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1221722386448
3. Diagnosed HIV prevalence in Local Authorities (LAs) in England, 2010: www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1228207184991 (see page 2 for London boroughs).
4. Further London HIV data is available at: www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1204031522939
5. Previous HIV in London report (2009 data): www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317131015065
6. Media enquiries - please contact the Health Protection Agency's London press office on 020 7811 7243 / tycie.west@hpa.org.uk