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# NEWS RELEASE

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**PR 18095**

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## **Reducing HIV late diagnosis in Hertfordshire**

**Hertfordshire County Council would like to clarify the work it is doing to reduce late HIV diagnoses in Hertfordshire.**

Although HIV late diagnosis rates in Hertfordshire are slightly above average, they have been reducing year on year for several years (51.7% compared to 45%). Several areas in the East of England have much higher rates than Hertfordshire.

The county council recently introduced plans to reduce late diagnoses using best national guidance from Public Health England, NICE and other national experts. Reducing the numbers of people with undiagnosed infection through promotion of HIV testing is a key part of Hertfordshire's Sexual Health Strategy (2014- 2019).

Hertfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Public Health, Localism and Libraries, Teresa Heritage, said: "Helping our residents to lead longer, happier lives really matters to us, which is why we are investing in local sexual health services and making it easier for people to get HIV tested early.

"We have redesigned our sexual health service, which now provides sexual health services in 18 sites across Hertfordshire; we have a contract for community HIV testing with HertsAid, our commissioned provider; and we will launch several campaigns over the next year on sexual health."

The county council is following guidance from national experts to put in place a series of actions across the whole county to bring the figures down even further:

- The county council is signed up to the national 'Halve It' campaign which promotes early identification of those with HIV using a variety of different techniques.
- From National HIV Testing Week (21 November 2015), Hertfordshire will be part of the roll out of a new national HIV home sampling service, which will enable residents to order a kit mailed to their address of choice and return it to a laboratory for testing, entirely free of charge. Only about 3 per cent of local authorities currently commission home sampling, with most awaiting the roll out of the national programme, which offers significant quality and safety benefits. For this reason the county council will not be procuring home sampling for HIV outside the national

programme\*.

- The county council is increasing the availability of HIV tests through GPs, pharmacies, healthcare and community settings. It is also expanding services offered at community events and through outreach work as part of its successful countywide partnership with HertsAid, particularly in areas where HIV rates and late diagnoses are highest. National guidance suggests these are important and effective strategies.
- Hertfordshire is working with health service staff to increase HIV testing at the 'point of care' for people who present with conditions that may be related to HIV but who are undiagnosed or untested. Hertfordshire experience and national evidence suggests that women are particularly at risk of presenting with HIV-related conditions but not having the underlying HIV infection picked up. For people in this situation, and those who would not think of themselves to have been at risk for HIV, this strategy is demonstrated to be effective, and is likely to be more effective than postal sampling.
- We are seeking increased opportunities to reach at-risk groups in their communities, working with agencies like Pride, LGBT Partnership, BME communities and HertsAid, among others. A sexual health improvement plan has been launched and a conference of over 100 different stakeholders held to underpin this.
- We continue to work alongside partners in Hertfordshire to raise awareness of the importance of testing.

HIV testing is free, quick, confidential and available at a range of locations across Hertfordshire. We urge anyone who would like to know more or request a test to visit <http://sexualhealthhertfordshire.clch.nhs.uk/stis/hiv-and-aids> or call Sexual Health Hertfordshire on 0300 008 5522.

For information about staying healthy in Hertfordshire please visit [www.hertsdirect.org/healthinherts](http://www.hertsdirect.org/healthinherts)

## **Ends**

Notes for editors:

### **\* National Home Sampling Scheme**

A new national home sampling service, of which Hertfordshire will be a part, officially launches during HIV Testing Week (w/c 21st November 2015) and will be supported by local and national media coverage.

Technologies for home sampling are developing: two national pilots, supported by Public Health England have recently demonstrated the feasibility, acceptability and effectiveness of such services. The national programme has put this learning at the centre of its development. Hertfordshire will join this new nationally procured HIV home sampling service, which is supported by Public Health England and consistent

with national expert guidance. Individuals will be able to order a kit to be posted to their address of choice and return it to a laboratory for testing, entirely free of charge.

The procurement of a nationwide HIV self-sampling service will be expected to offer major cost and quality benefits. HIV home-sampling will complement our commissioned sexual health and HIV service providers by offering an alternative service to those who either have never tested for HIV or wish to test more regularly.

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