

Press Release

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October 3, 2006

New York City Public Hospitals Expand HIV Testing

Rapid Testing and More Routine Testing Reaches Patients not Commonly Known to be at Risk, Including More Women and Teens

New York City - New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) President Alan D. Aviles today announced that the city's public hospital system tested 92,000 patients during fiscal year 2006, a 63 percent increase over the 58,000 tested in FY 2005. HHC expanded testing by using HIV rapid tests and by making testing part of routine medical care for wider group of patients including more women and teens. Aviles also announced that HHC will aim to further expand testing to 150,000 patients in the next year.

"The public hospitals are making HIV tests part of routine medical care to lessen the stigma that is sometimes associated with HIV testing and help reach more New Yorkers who may have the disease and not know it. We are aggressively offering testing to patients who come to us for routine physicals, heart disease, a sprained ankle -- and we are trying to reach more women, seniors and teens who may not consider themselves at risk," said HHC President Aviles.

HHC attributes its program success to the wide use of HIV rapid testing and expanding testing to emergency departments, outpatient clinics and other health care settings outside the HIV and prenatal clinics where HIV testing is commonly done. HHC also streamlined pre-test counseling and is using all the flexibility New York State laws allow by adopting the use of educational videos, written materials and expanding the pool of counseling staff beyond traditional HIV counselors.

HHC's HIV testing program expansion highlights:

- Increased testing by 63 percent -- tested 92,000 patients in FY06 compared to 58,000 in FY05.
- More than doubled the number of HIV positive patients identified: 1,514 individuals in FY06 compared to 720 patients in FY05.
- Patients tested in outpatient settings in FY 06 included: 82% female; 17% males; 89.8% Black, Latino, Asian; 16% under 18 years old; and 9.3% over 45 years old.
- Patients overwhelmingly agree to be tested.

"Too many New Yorkers still don't know their HIV status. We need to identify more undiagnosed patients, connect them to treatment early and increase their chances of living a long and relatively healthy life. Early diagnosis also helps to reduce the transmission of HIV and slow the epidemic,"

added Aviles.

HHC expanded testing to emergency departments, select medical and psychiatric services and in one phlebotomy clinic where patients who go to the lab for blood work. In addition to using rapid HIV tests, HHC's 11 hospitals and many of its community-based family health centers streamlined the pre-test counseling and consent process using New York State's revised guidelines. This reduced wait time and staff resources necessary to complete the test. Patients who agree to be tested must still sign a consent form after receiving information about the test and before being tested. Trained HHC HIV counselors are always available to counsel patients who test positive.

"Results from a conventional HIV test can take days. That meant patients left the hospital or health center without knowing their status. It was sometimes impossible to contact patients who tested positive and get them to come back in for services. Now results are available while the patient waits and, if positive, patients can begin treatment immediately," added HHC President Aviles.

HHC's HIV rapid test program expansion was partly supported with \$3 million allocated by the New York City Council during FY 2006. The City Council agreed to provide another \$3 million to continue the expansion through FY 2007. HHC also receives funding from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) for HIV programs, including testing and treatment.

"All HHC hospitals are Designated AIDS Centers with extensive HIV/AIDS services. We want New Yorkers to know they can walk into any HHC hospital or clinic and quickly obtain confidential, convenient HIV testing, as well as expert treatment and counseling, regardless of ability to pay or immigration status," added Aviles.

HHC currently serves about 19,000 HIV/AIDS patients - about one fifth of the more than 96,800 people known to be living with HIV/AIDS in New York City. According to DOHMH, New York City remains the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the U.S. accounting for 14% of the country's AIDS-related deaths. An estimated 20,000 New Yorkers are living with HIV/AIDS, but do not know they are infected and 1,000 New Yorkers each year first learn they have HIV when they are already sick with AIDS. More than 20,000 New Yorkers living with HIV or AIDS are over the age of 50, and one-third of the new diagnoses annually are among women. HIV is the 3rd leading cause of death below age 65 in New York City.

The Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), the largest municipal hospital and health care system in the country, is a \$4.5 billion public benefit corporation that serves 1.3 million New Yorkers and nearly 450,000 who are uninsured. HHC provides medical, mental health and substance abuse services through its 11 acute care hospitals, four skilled nursing facilities, six large diagnostic and treatment centers and nearly 100 community based clinics. For more information about HHC, visit www.nyc.gov/hhc.