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## DOH-WALTON OBSERVES WORLD AIDS DAY, CONTINUES FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS OFFERS FREE TESTING DECEMBER 3



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**DeFuniak Springs, Fla.**—As the Florida Department of Health in Walton unites with partners worldwide in observance of World AIDS Day on December 1, the department reaffirms its commitment to fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS in Florida and helping connect individuals who are positive with lifesaving treatment and services. This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the observance of World AIDS Day, and the national theme is “Saving Lives through Leadership and Partnerships.”

“Each year, World AIDS day provides an opportunity to raise awareness and encourage testing. With early diagnosis, individuals can begin appropriate treatment and care resulting in better health outcomes”, stated Holly Holt, Health Officer and Administrator.

DOH-Walton will provide free HIV testing on December 3<sup>rd</sup> at the DeFuniak Springs location. Please call (850) 892-8015 to schedule an appointment. A walk-in STD clinic is available every afternoon from 3-4:00 p.m. at the DeFuniak Springs location, 362 State Highway 83, DeFuniak Springs, FL 32433.

Over 1.1 million people in the US are living with HIV, but one in seven HIV-positive people do not know they are living with the disease.

Florida is a national leader in HIV testing. We have made great strides in prevention, early identification and treatment, however there is still much work to be done. In an effort to reach the goal of zero new HIV transmissions and reduced HIV-related deaths, the department is focusing on four key strategies:

- Implementing routine screening for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, especially among high-risk populations.
- Providing immediate access to treatment for the newly diagnosed as well as retaining HIV-positive persons in the care system, with the ultimate goal of getting HIV-positive persons to an undetectable viral load.
- Improving and promoting the use of PrEP and nPEP as prevention strategies to reduce the risk of contracting HIV.
- Increasing community outreach and awareness about HIV, high-risk behaviors and the importance of knowing one’s status.

There are currently 45 Test and Treat sites operating in Florida. With early diagnosis, individuals can begin appropriate treatment and care resulting in better health outcomes. Receiving antiretroviral therapy as quickly as possible after diagnosis improves the health of persons living with HIV and can eventually lead to undetectable viral loads, which reduces the chance of transmission to others.

As part of our strategic efforts to eliminate HIV in Florida, the department is currently working to make Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) medication available at no cost at all of the 67 county health departments (CHDs). Currently, 43 CHDs offer PrEP services with the objective to implement PrEP services in STD or Family Planning clinics for all CHDs by the end of 2018. PrEP is a once-daily pill that can reduce HIV-negative individuals' risk of acquiring HIV. **PrEP should be used in conjunction with other prevention methods, like condoms, to reduce the risk of transmission.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, taking PrEP daily reduces the risk of contracting HIV by more than 90 percent.

Patients can obtain up to a 90-day supply of PrEP through their local CHD STD and Family Planning Clinic. Some CHDs may offer PrEP through specialty clinics. View the department's [PrEP Locator](#) to find a PrEP provider in your area.

Every CHD offers high-quality HIV testing services, but you can also locate HIV counseling, testing and referral sites by visiting [KnowYourHIVStatus.com](http://KnowYourHIVStatus.com) or texting your zip code to 477493.

For more information, call the Florida AIDS Hotline at 1-800-FLA-AIDS or 1-800-352-2437; en Español, 1-800-545-SIDA; in Creole, 1-800-AIDS-101.

### **About the Florida Department of Health**

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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