

For Immediate Release
Contact: Dr. Jenna LeComte-Hinely
760.404.1945
Jlecomte-hinely@HARCdata.org



World AIDS Day: Awareness, Statistics, and Local Resources

Palm Desert, CA (December 1, 2017) – December 1st marks the annual recognition of World AIDS Day; an international health observance day aimed at raising awareness of the AIDS epidemic and commemorating those lives that have been lost by the AIDS epidemic. HARC, Inc. is a local nonprofit committed to population health data, and they provide a closer look at HIV/AIDS on this important day.

What is HIV and AIDS?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a disease that attacks certain types of cells that help the body's immune system. Once HIV has entered the body, the disease is with the person for the remainder of his or her life. If treatment is not pursued, the person will progress through three stages of HIV: acute HIV infection, clinical latency, and finally, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). At the final stage of the disease (AIDS), the immune system is so severely damaged, it cannot effectively defend itself and becomes susceptible to a range of diseases and opportunistic infections. A person with AIDS left untreated is expected to only live an additional three years.

Prevention and Treatment

While there is no cure for HIV/AIDS, there are methods for prevention and treatment of the disease. Firstly, HIV/AIDS can be prevented in a variety of ways. For example, practicing safe sex, getting tested for HIV, knowing your partner's status, limiting the number of partners, and not injecting drugs will help prevent HIV. Those people who are at high risk of acquiring HIV (men who have sex with other men, using and sharing needles or syringes, having multiple sex partners, already having a sexually transmitted infection) can use a preventative treatment called PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). Taken regularly and consistently, PrEP can help to reduce the risk of getting HIV. If someone is already diagnosed with HIV, they may begin antiretroviral therapy (ART), which will help decrease the progression of AIDS, maintain health, and reduce the risk of transmitting the disease to a partner.

How Common is HIV?

It is estimated that about 1.1 million people are living with HIV in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Of those living with HIV, about 15% do not know that they are infected with the disease. Because it is possible to be infected with HIV and to be unaware, it is critical to become tested and obtain treatment if necessary. Despite the importance of getting tested for HIV, HARC data indicates that more than half (52.8%) of adults in the Coachella Valley have not been tested for HIV—nearly 160,000 people. Additionally, another 21,000 people have engaged in high-risk behaviors and therefore have an increased risk of contracting HIV.

Certain populations are also affected by HIV at higher rates than others. According to the CDC, men who have sex with men, African Americans, and younger people have demonstrated increasing rates of HIV diagnoses. It is estimated that men who have sexual contact with other men account for about 70% of all new HIV infections. Another disproportionately affected population includes African Americans: roughly 45% of new HIV diagnoses are accounted for by African Americans. The high rate of diagnosis with this group is likely due to their increased prevalence rate and the tendency for African American's to have sex with members of the same race/ethnicity. Finally, another population with higher rates of HIV infection are young people, those aged 13 to 24. HARC data has also demonstrated that young people aged 18 to 24 (over 21,000 young adults) are significantly less likely to get tested, despite a high infection rate.

Local Resources in the Coachella Valley

Desert AIDS Project, located in Palm Springs, provides a range of comprehensive preventative and primary healthcare services related to AIDS/HIV. Desert AIDS Project also has on-site testing for sexually transmitted infections, an education clinic, and free HIV oral rapid testing.

To learn more about HIV/AIDS, please visit www.cdc.gov/hiv/

To learn more about World AIDS day, please visit www.worldaidsday.org

About HARC

HARC is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization based in Palm Desert, CA. HARC provides research and evaluation services in the field of health, wellness, and quality of life, with a special focus on the Coachella Valley. To learn more about HARC, visit

www.HARCdata.org