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## **For Immediate Release**

*MCHD will offer rapid results HIV testing, gift cards in observance of World AIDS Day*

**MORGANTOWN, WV (Nov. 22, 2021)** — As with many tasks in life, when it comes to HIV testing, the waiting is sometimes the hardest part.

That’s one reason why Wednesday, Dec. 1, will be a convenient time to get an HIV test at Monongalia County Health Department at the Access for All Clinic. Participants will be offered the chance to get a rapid HIV test and find out the results in under 30 minutes.

“The rapids are going to be finger sticks, just a tiny finger stick, and if someone is borderline or positive, that is followed up with a blood test,” said Chantry Michael, RN, of MCHD Clinical Services, who has helped organize the day of testing with Kayla Sisler, LPN, Monica Cutlip, RN, and Mark Liptrap, Monongalia County Health Department’s social worker and counselor.

Timed to coincide with World AIDS Day, the Access for All Clinic will allow individuals to be screened for more than just HIV. Tests will include those for chlamydia and gonorrhea, which are done via a urine sample, and also for syphilis and hepatitis B and C, which require a blood draw.

“If someone is high risk, we’ll do the hepatitis B test,” Michael said. “Most times, the full panel is everything but hepatitis B.”

MCHD Clinical Services has held HIV testing events before on World AIDS Day, but not since before the pandemic, and the Access for All Clinic will be bigger than previous ones.

“We’ve been able to open our clinics more, and we thought it would be a great time to integrate everything we’ve done over the past year,” Michael said.

That includes working on reducing stigma surrounding sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Plus, staff members recently took Safe Zone training from the LGBTQ+ Center at West Virginia University, in order to learn how to more effectively treat patients from that community.

“Anyone who calls and schedules an appointment, we always try to make them feel comfortable,” Michael said. “We’re here for them with no judgment. It doesn’t matter what brought you here. We want to do what’s best for our patients.”

In addition to the tests, other incentives will be offered to bring patients in and make them more comfortable when they are here, with help from outside entities, including the West Virginia University Positive Health Clinic.

For instance, “The Positive Clinic is providing Kroger and Walmart gift cards for us to give out to participants, which is really appreciated and should help drive attendance,” Michael said.

Also, in addition to appointments, which can be made by calling MCHD Clinical Services at 304-598-5119, walk-ins will also be welcome.

“Having an event like this for World AIDS Day brings to light and illustrates that no matter where you come from, STI screening is part of a wellness check,” Michael said. “Just like you go to your primary caregiver once a year, if you are sexually active, give STI tests the same weight as your annual visit. It should be included in your health care. It should be a big priority for people who want to make sure that they are healthy.”

It’s recommended that all sexually active individuals be tested for STIs at least once a year, and sometimes more often depending on the circumstances.

In addition to the rapid tests, there will be other incentives to draw people to the clinic. “We’ll have a table in the lobby with resources, including extra condoms and information packets,” Michael said. “And the Positive Clinic is going to bring keychains that have cute sayings. We just want to offer little incentives for people to come get tested.”

If someone does receive news of a positive test, a disease intervention specialist from the West Virginia Bureau of Public Health will be available to talk to the individual and follow up with anyone who needs treatment and help with contacts.

“If we can’t reach someone who is positive, he will try to reach out via social media or text, things we can’t do here,” Michael said.

He also can also work to get in touch with partners who should be informed of positive results.

“If a patient gives us this information, we will contact the partners anonymously and then we would screen them and treat them without identifying who the positive individual is,” Michael said.

Conceived by the World Health Organization (WHO), the first World AIDS Day was held on Dec. 1, 1988, in the midst of the pandemic that emerged earlier in the decade.

The idea was to highlight human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which, if left untreated, usually led to AIDS, or acquired immune deficiency syndrome, and also death.

Treatments for the virus have vastly improved the outlook for individuals with HIV since then, Liptrap noted.

“The advancements in HIV research have been remarkable and treatments are very effective,” Liptrap said. “Individuals who test positive for HIV these days and begin treatment early can have a very normal and healthy life.”

And the earlier, the better, for everyone. “Knowing your status can provide knowledge, and knowledge is power to have control over your life,” he added. “And protecting our partners is everyone’s responsibility.”

Of course, that includes for all STIs in general. In recent years, chlamydia and gonorrhea cases have spiked sharply, and cases of syphilis, once considered to be under control, have been on the rise as well, including with an outbreak in Morgantown in the spring of 2019.

All three can be cured with antibiotics, especially when caught early. According to the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health’s Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services, chlamydia is the most profilerous of the reportable STIs in the state, with 4,128 infections in 2017. That’s 222.8 individuals per 100,000.

Hepatitis B has no cure but can go away by itself. Along with hepatitis A, hepatitis B can be prevented with a vaccine that many of today's young adults received as children.

And earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called a cluster of HIV cases in Charleston "the most concerning" in the United States.

Since reopening after the first few months into the COVID pandemic, MCHD Clinical Services staff members have safely treated patients using protocols that include temperature scans at the front door and wearing masks.

"We hope this event will help individuals who are seeking STI screenings a convenient way to establish care," Michael said.

For up-to-date information on health and wellness in Monongalia County, check out [monchd.org](http://monchd.org) and follow the health department on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd.

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