Why Not Test for HIV Along With COVID-19?

A West Virginia drive-through event does exactly that—plus give free Naloxone trainings.

October 29, 2020 By Trent Straube

After observing a spike in HIV cases, state health officials in West Virginia began offering HIV tests at COVID-19 testing events in Kanawha County.

This allows for a targeted outreach to communities and areas at higher risk for HIV and to those who aren't connected to health care services, reports WOWK 13 News. For example, the uptick in HIV cases is among people who are experiencing homelessness or social instability and therefore are less likely to be taking HIV meds and maintaining an undetectable viral load. Consequently, these individuals are more likely to transmit the virus sexually.

Higher HIV rates are also more common among injection drug users in the region. Because of the prevalence of injection drug use, health officials have also offered free Naloxone training to those awaiting their HIV test results. Naloxone is a medication that reverses an opioid overdose.

"While you have someone that might be at risk of HIV, you have the opportunity right there in front of you to do the counseling," Sherri Young, DO, of the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department, told the news station, adding that you can ask people questions such as "What are your risk factors?" "How can we get you into treatment?" "How can we get you help?"

Kanawha County, home to the state capital Charleston, has seen an overall drop in HIV cases from 2019 to 2020, though cases have nearly doubled among those who inject drugs.

For a related article in POZ magazine from last October, see "HIV Task Force Launches in West Virginia Amid Drug Use Concerns."

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