

## **Please Test Me**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 7 individuals in the United States has HIV and isn't aware that they have the virus. Being tested for HIV is as simple as taking ten minutes out of your day or by asking our medical provider at your next appointment. Please test me. A simple phrase, not scary, that can help you to know your HIV status. Why then aren't people getting tested; why do they sometimes go for years with HIV in their system before they get the medical help that they need?

You wake up with a sore throat and cannot swallow. You go to your medical provider and say, please test me. You have a pain in your side for a week. You go to your medical provider and say, please test me. You just feel "off". You go to your medical provider and say, please test me. Unfortunately, there is still an incredible amount of stigma surrounding HIV, which only serves to hurt the individuals who need help and treatment the most. This stigma continues to be a major reason as to why people don't get tested.

As someone who wants to fight the stigma around HIV testing, here's what I do, and what you can do too:

- Break the silence around HIV in your community. Just talking about HIV helps to alleviate the fears that most people have.
- Get informed about how to protect yourself from HIV and be able to tell others how they can protect themselves as well.
- Treat anyone with HIV as you would treat anyone else; they're a person who deserves respect and empathy.
- Take responsibility for the prevention of HIV and get yourself tested.
- Avoid using language that stigmatizes others and challenge attitudes that contribute to stigma.

June 27<sup>th</sup> is National HIV Testing Day, a time to focus on ending the stigma of HIV by getting tested. Getting an HIV test should not be a scary experience, it should be liberating! You are taking control of your health, the health of your friends and family, and the health of the community around you by knowing your HIV status. You can make a difference by being tested and asking your family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to get tested too.

On Wednesday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, Family First Health will be providing free, confidential HIV tests for any community member aged 13 and up from 10:00am – 2:00pm at their Columbia Center office, located at 369 Locust Street in Downtown Columbia. For more information, contact the Caring Together program manager, Rebecca Wilson at 717-846-6776. If you cannot make it on the 28<sup>th</sup> you can also find confidential HIV testing locally by visiting the CDC's National HIV and STD Testing Resources website, located at <http://hivtest.cdc.gov/>, or by calling your local health department. Stop by and say, please test me.

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