The importance of HIV testing
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June 27, 2012 marks the 17th anniversary since the launch of National HIV Testing Day. Since 1995, the National Association of People with AIDS (NAWPA) in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other organizations have dedicated this day to education and to encourage and support HIV testing in the community.

Today, approximately 1.2 million people in the United States are currently living with HIV. Of those living with HIV, 20% do not know they are infected. This alarming statistic is one reason why it is essential to get tested.

There are common misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted. An individual cannot contract HIV from everyday activities such as sharing utensils with someone who is HIV positive or get the virus from insect bites. However, HIV can be contracted by the transmission of four different bodily fluids. These specific fluids include blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. These bodily fluids can only transmit HIV through contact with broken skin, contact with mucous membranes, or by entering the bloodstream through a needle or syringe.

The CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 get tested at least once. However, if a person is involved in behavior that may put them at risk to get the disease, it is recommended to get tested once a year. Certain “at risk” activities include people with multiple sex partners and injection drug users. The CDC also recommends that pregnant women get tested in order to prevent transmission from mother to child through medication. It is important for people that put themselves at risk to get tested, because many people will not show any immediate signs or symptoms.

One of the most important reasons to get tested is empowerment. Knowing your status gives you control of your future. The test takes approximately 30 minutes and is given by a trained health care
provider. The results are confidential and could be anonymous if you so choose. Getting tested would give you the opportunity to speak with your health care provider about the necessary steps to decrease your chance of getting HIV. If the test were to come back positive, the medication available would allow a person to live a long and fulfilling life. So remember, “Take the Test, Take Control.”

To find a test site near you, text your ZIP code to KNOWIT (566948) or visit http://ow.ly/1QiX6 Rapid HIV Testing is available by appointment only at the MCHD Norristown clinic site on Tuesdays from 9:00am-11:30am and on Thursdays from 1:00pm-3:30pm. This method provides a result in approximately 30 minutes. Call today to schedule an appointment at 610-278-5117 and ask to speak to someone about a Rapid HIV test.