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Letters
Editorials
Obituaries
Schools
Sports
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Online Obituary Submission
Featured Special Sections
About Us
Archive
Contact Us
Services
Advertiser Index

Letters   December 1, 2004   Search Archives   Search



## Health center director calls attention to HIV/AIDS plight

World AIDS Day, Dec. 1, is the perfect time to call attention to New Jersey's HIV/AIDS plight and discuss what you can do to help stem this epidemic.

As of June 30, more than 32,400 people were reported living with HIV or AIDS in New Jersey, according to the state Department of Health and Senior Services New Jersey HIV/AIDS Report. That's a 3.5 percent increase (1,081 more people infected) in the first six months of this year.

Minorities account for 75 percent of adult and adolescent HIV/AIDS cases — and the disparity is growing, the report states.

Thirty-five percent of cumulative cases are females, with black women accounting for the majority of infections.

The predominant modes of infection are injection drug use, male-to-male sexual contact, and male-to-female sexual transmission.

Because there are untold numbers of people who don't realize they are infected and continue spreading the disease, it is crucial for New Jersey's overall health to identify people at risk and steer them toward HIV counseling and testing facilities.

Such publicly funded services are offered at more than 300 sites throughout the state, at which as many as 70,000 tests are conducted annually.

Every day, federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) throughout New Jersey — known collectively as “the feel good place” — offer high-quality testing and counseling for all individuals, whether they have insurance, limited ability to pay or none at all.

New Jersey's 20 FQHCs can be an affordable first step in early HIV/AIDS detection.

They also provide the opportunity for patients or anyone exposed to the virus to ask a health care provider about the risk factors, signs and symptoms associated with HIV/AIDS, receive counseling, learn how to cope with a positive diagnosis, or avoid situations that put people at risk.

If you suspect you or someone you know might be infected, call the New Jersey HIV/AIDS Hotline, (800) 624-2377, or call the Monmouth Family Health Center at (732) 923-7137, a community health center, for a confidential test.

Marta Cuellar Silverberg

executive director

Monmouth Family

Health Center

Long Branch



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