

## Opinion Editorial

# Florida Department of Health in Broward County implementing 4 key components to reduce rates of HIV

Author: Paula M. Thaqi, M.D., M.P.H., Director, Florida Department of Health in Broward County

August 28, 2017

Contact: Candy Sims, Public Information Officer  
(954) 467-4784 – [candy.sims@flhealth.gov](mailto:candy.sims@flhealth.gov)



*Paula M. Thaqi, M.D., M.P.H.,  
Director, Florida Department of  
Health in Broward County*

(Fort Lauderdale, FL) - The Florida Department of Health (DOH-Broward) is implementing 4 key components to reduce rates of new HIV infection in Broward County. These include routine HIV testing in the healthcare setting and targeted testing in the non-healthcare setting, HIV Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Non-occupational Post Exposure Prophylaxis (nPEP), community outreach and Test and Treat. On May 1, 2017, DOH-Broward, in partnership with the Broward County Ryan White Part A Grantee Office, HIV testing sites (registered), hospitals, federally qualified health centers, community based organizations, emergency departments and physicians, launched Test and Treat in Broward County.

Test and Treat is a voluntary clinical program providing immediate entry into HIV primary care and initiation of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), medication that treats HIV. People newly diagnosed with HIV, as well as those who previously tested positive and are not in regular HIV primary care, are eligible for Test and Treat. Clients are offered the opportunity to start ART the same day of diagnosis or returning to care. The program benefits the client's health and the community. Since the program began, over 335 clients have been enrolled in Test and Treat.

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Guidelines currently recommend ART for all people living with HIV. Increasing data show a medical benefit to the client when immediate ART is initiated, particularly during acute/early HIV infection. ART decreases the amount of HIV virus in the blood to undetectable levels, which makes people far less likely to progress to developing AIDS and greatly reduces the risk of transmitting HIV to sexual partners. Many clients report that the decision to start ART and quickly achieving undetectable levels of HIV virus provides them with the first experience of empowerment in living with HIV.

On a daily basis, healthcare providers and community partners notify DOH-Broward about potential Test and Treat clients. DOH-Broward staff meet the client immediately and offer them the option of Test and Treat. If the client accepts, the staff member accompanies the client to see an HIV primary care physician the same day at one of the participating Test and Treat providers. These include AIDS Healthcare Foundation, Broward Community and Family Health Centers, Broward Health, Care Resource, Children's Diagnostic and Treatment Center, Memorial Healthcare Systems and several private infectious disease practices. In most cases, the client receives a 30 day supply of medication immediately. DOH-Broward staff follow Test and Treat clients closely to ensure that they have completed the eligibility process for services, are connected to all appropriate services, are keeping appointments and are taking their medication every day. Staff also assist with addressing barriers and navigating the system of care.

DOH-Broward, together with our partners, is working to build upon the success of the first 4 months of the Test and Treat program and to continuously improve the process for our community. Along with the implementation of routine HIV testing in the healthcare setting and targeted testing in the non-healthcare setting, PrEP and nPEP and community outreach, Test and Treat has the potential to prevent new HIV infections in our community and improve the health of people living with HIV/AIDS.

For more information, please visit [broward.floridahealth.gov](http://broward.floridahealth.gov) or call 954-467-4700 ext. 5233.

#### **About the Florida Department of Health**

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

Follow us on Twitter at [@FLHealthBroward](#) and on [Facebook](#). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit [www.FloridaHealth.gov](http://www.FloridaHealth.gov)