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Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium increases access to HIV testing

Service aims to raise awareness and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among Alaska Natives and rural Alaskans

March 19, 2021 ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) announces the launch of an HIV self-testing program to increase access to HIV testing. HIV self-testing kits will be made available via ANTHC's sexual and holistic wellness website iknowmine.org. This service bridges the gap for many people living in remote and rural Alaska where access to HIV testing is limited or there are [concerns about privacy and confidentiality](#). This service complements self-testing already available for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Both self-testing kits are available statewide to anyone with an Alaska mailing address and at no cost to the end users. The program is being launched this week in partnership with the State of Alaska in observance of National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, March 20th.

"We know that Alaska Native health is tied closely to the health of all Alaskans, which is why we're happy to use our position as statewide health services providers to expand access to necessary HIV tests and screening," offered ANTHC's HIV/STD Prevention Program Manager Hannah Warren.

The HIV self-testing kits use the OraQuick rapid-test method which allows users to test discreetly and privately. Users are linked with a nurse case manager upon ordering a kit. This connection ensures that individuals have the support needed to accurately use and interpret the test, know who to follow-up with regarding results, and get questions answered pertaining to the kit, HIV and other STIs, including safe-sex and risk-reduction counseling. A positive result must be confirmed with an in-person test in a clinic to rule out any false-positive results.

HIV screening is part of [routine health care](#). The CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 get tested for HIV at least once in their lifetime and annually if at higher risk.

Early HIV detection and diagnosis has a substantially positive impact on health outcomes and prevents hospitalizations. Whether as part of routine health care or due to potential exposure to HIV, the HIV

self-test helps keep individuals and their sexual partner(s) safer and healthier. The hope is that individuals who utilize this service will share their experience and encourage others in their social networks to also get tested.

Any Alaska resident who feels at risk of contracting HIV should consider ordering a kit through iknowmine.org. Risk factors include:

1. Injection-drug use
2. People who exchange sex for money or drugs
3. Sex partners of people with HIV
4. Sexually active men who have sex with men
5. Heterosexuals who themselves or whose sex partners have had ≥ 1 sex partner since their most recent HIV test
6. People receiving treatment for hepatitis, tuberculosis or a sexually transmitted infection
7. People who themselves or their sex partner(s) have been diagnosed with any STIs

“The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted access to routine healthcare services such as HIV and STD screening for many Alaskans,” commented Susan A. Jones, HIV/STD Program Manager for DHSS. “We are excited to support innovative strategies such as ANTHC’s HIV self-testing program which increases access to these important services for all Alaskans, particularly those living in rural and remote parts of the state.” The kits are federally funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s HIV Prevention funds. The CDC [recently encouraged](#) states to expand self-testing for HIV.

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