

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 27, 2019

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TDH JOINS “U=U” IN EFFORT TO END THE HIV EPIDEMIC IN TENNESSEE

World AIDS Day is December 1, 2019

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – In Tennessee, approximately 18,000 people are living with HIV, and 760 of them were newly diagnosed in 2018. The Tennessee Department of Health is working to increase access to preventive medication and empower HIV-positive Tennesseans to seek and stay engaged in HIV care. As part of this effort to end the HIV epidemic in Tennessee, TDH is joining the “Undetectable Equals Untransmittable” or “U=U” campaign.

“While Tennessee’s rate of new HIV diagnoses is similar to the national rate, some areas of our state still see rates far beyond the national average,” said Tennessee Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey, MD, MBA, FAAP. “We continue to employ new tools and proven strategies to address this health challenge, and with focused efforts and commitment from Tennesseans, we can end this epidemic.”

Undetectable Equals Untransmittable

The “Undetectable Equals Untransmittable” or “U=U” campaign promotes the message that individuals with HIV who get medication and achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus. This message is vital to combatting HIV-related stigma and empowering people to enter and remain engaged in HIV care. TDH is leading the way by becoming one of the first state health departments in the South to become a U=U community partner. Learn more about U=U at www.preventionaccess.org/.

“The most important thing someone living with HIV can do to stay healthy and prevent transmission of HIV is to be treated with medications on an ongoing basis,” said Pamela Talley, MD, MPH, medical director of the TDH HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis section. “The science is clear. Numerous studies have shown that people living with HIV who take their medications as prescribed and get and keep an undetectable viral load have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV.”

Nearly half of all people living with HIV in the United States live in the South. While other regions of the U.S. have seen a decline in the rate of new HIV diagnoses over the last several years, rates among Southern states have remained stable.

Treatment Reduces Transmission Risk

Those who test negative for HIV and are sexually active can stay negative through proven prevention methods. Daily medication known as “PrEP” can reduce transmission of the virus to HIV-negative people by up to 99 percent. TDH continues to expand PrEP availability and use across the state. Learn more and find a prescriber by visiting getpreptn.com.

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Know Your Status

Everyone living in Tennessee can play an important role in ending the HIV epidemic by knowing their HIV status. Almost half of all new HIV transmission occurs among people who are unaware they have the virus. Testing is the first step to maintaining a healthy life and reducing the spread of HIV. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends every person over the age of 13 should be tested for HIV at least once. Tennesseans can find free and confidential HIV testing at their [local health department](#) or by visiting gettested.cdc.gov.

The mission of the Tennessee Department of Health is to protect, promote and improve the health and prosperity of people in Tennessee. Learn more about TDH services and programs at www.tn.gov/health.

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