

For more information, contact: Cassie Evans Winter,
Assistant VP Communications/Marketing at 337-5309

State changes HIV screening practices to promote early detection & treatment

If you bring your 13-year-old son to the emergency department for a broken wrist after a snowboarding accident, don't be surprised if he's offered an HIV test.

Under a new state law, New York's hospitals and primary care providers must offer HIV testing to all patients between the ages of 13 and 64 at least once, explained Rome Memorial Hospital Infection Prevention Director LeAnna Grace. HIV testing is also offered to any individual, engaging in at-risk behavior regardless of age or how many times the test has been offered.

"HIV/AIDS continues to be a major health concern for New Yorkers, and this important change in the law will make HIV testing more routine, while maintaining key patient privacy protections," State Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D., said when announcing the new law. "The law brings New York's testing practices more in line with guidelines issued by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and strengthens our efforts to combat HIV and AIDS."

It is estimated that 20 percent of New Yorkers with HIV don't know they are infected. About 33 percent of those who newly discover that they are HIV-positive are diagnosed with AIDS within one year. Earlier testing would have linked these individuals to health care that could prevent the onset of AIDS and encourage them to take measures that would avoid transmitting the virus to others.

"Before the offer for HIV testing is made, patients will be given educational information about the virus and how it spreads. Patients will have the option to accept or decline the test," Grace said. "If a patient tests positive, an appointment will be made with an HIV/AIDS Treatment Center, with the patient's consent."

Free anonymous HIV testing also continues to be offered through the Oneida County Health Department. For more information about free testing, please call the county at 798-5748.

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