

An HIV test can be the first step to a healthy life

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On this World AIDS Day, health experts at Baylor College of Medicine are reminding everyone that knowing whether or not you are infected with HIV is the first step to living a healthy life.

"There are more than 1 million people infected with HIV throughout the United States, and more than 26,000 of them are living in Houston. Sadly, of those in Houston, it is estimated that around one out of every five people living with HIV does not know they have it," said Dr. Monisha Arya, assistant professor of medicine – infectious disease at Baylor and the lead physician for HIV testing in the Harris Health System. "The only way to find out if you are infected is to get tested."

Arya said that once a person knows his or her [diagnosis](#), he or she can make smart [health](#) decisions. While a positive diagnosis can be overwhelming, current medications, especially if started near the time of diagnosis, not only make it possible to live a long and [healthy life](#), but also significantly lower the chance of giving HIV to a partner. If a negative diagnosis is found, then continuing to take proper precautions is encouraged.

Unfortunately, in Houston around one in five people find out they have HIV after it is too late, at or near the time of an AIDS diagnosis. At that point, a life-threatening infection or cancer might already be progressing, or they might have passed HIV to their partners without knowing it. Getting routinely tested for HIV is the only sure way to know if you are infected, said Arya.

Haley Marek, a first-year medical student at Baylor College of Medicine who previously interned in the department of medicine – infectious disease at Baylor while she was a public health student at the University of Texas at Austin, said that HIV doesn't discriminate—it can affect anyone.

"No matter your race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender or even your socioeconomic standing, you could be infected with HIV. Even if you look and feel healthy, you might be infected, so it is important to get tested for HIV to find out," she said.

Some are at higher risk for HIV and should get tested more frequently, such as those who have more than one sex partner, have another [sexually transmitted disease](#) (STD), are a gay or bisexual man or inject drugs.

Arya says everyone should talk to their doctor about testing. However, even if a person does not have a regular doctor, there still are options for regular testing.

"There are usually sites offering fast and confidential HIV testing; a quick search online can help locate one in the area. It is typically free with health insurance, but many sites also offer it for free or at low cost without insurance," said Arya. "There is no reason not to be 'doing it'! Join the movement and get HIV tested today."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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