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NEWS RELEASE

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**Increase in Idaho HIV Cases Prompts Health Officials
To Urge Testing for People at Risk**

Idaho health officials warn people that an increase in Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infections is being reported in the state and urge people at risk to get tested.

“HIV infections appear to be on the rise in young people in Idaho,” says Dr. Christine Hahn, state epidemiologist. “Some people are putting themselves at risk for a preventable infection which is lifelong and can cause serious illness and death. We are concerned that people think the risk of HIV is low since they have heard little about it in the news lately. This increase in new infections reminds all of us that the risk is real in Idaho”.

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. People often are infected with HIV by having unprotected sex with someone who has HIV, or sharing needles to inject drugs with someone infected with HIV. There is no cure for HIV or AIDS. Without medical treatment, HIV can progress to AIDS, which is generally a fatal disease.

So far this year, 37 people have been reported with HIV or AIDS, with additional reports under investigation. This is a 23% increase over reports from the same time last year, and includes 13 cases involving individuals under 25 years of age. Many of these reports are from southeastern Idaho, where Southeastern District Health Department recently announced an alarming increase in newly identified cases over the past several weeks.

The 2008 reports are being seen in people putting themselves at risk in several ways, including:

- People having unprotected sex with multiple sexual partners, sometimes finding anonymous partners through Internet sites;
- Men having unprotected sex with other men; and
- People sharing injection drug paraphernalia, such as needles and syringes.

People who may have put themselves at risk are urged to get tested at their private healthcare provider or at a District health department clinic in their area. In some clinics, results are available during the same visit. A listing of Idaho testing sites is available by going to <http://nakedtruth.idaho.gov> and clicking on ‘Resources.’

(more)

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 21% of HIV-infected persons are not aware of their HIV-positive status. Infected persons who have not been diagnosed are not able to receive potentially life-saving medication, and may unknowingly spread the virus.

The CDC recently released new estimates of the number of HIV cases in the U.S. According to the new estimates, 56,300 HIV infections occurred in the U.S. in 2006. Men who have sex with men accounted for 53 percent of those with new infections, heterosexuals for 31 percent, and injection drug users for 12 percent.

Prior to 1996, scientists estimated that about half the people with HIV would develop AIDS within 10 years after becoming infected. Since 1996, the introduction of powerful anti-retroviral therapies has dramatically changed the progression time between HIV infection and the development of AIDS. Early detection of infection allows for more options for treatment and preventative health care.

Additional information about HIV prevention is available at

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/index.htm>

(Editors: For more information please contact IDHW Public Information Officer Tom Shanahan at (208) 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)