



Paul R. LePage, Governor

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Dear Partner,

Maine Center for Disease Control is pleased to announce its support of National Woman and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, which is being observed on Saturday March 10th. National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is a nationwide observance that encourages people to take action in the fight against HIV/AIDS and raise awareness of its impact on women and girls.

Nationally, women make up one in four new HIV infections. In Maine, 16% of all new HIV infections occur in women. Women of color carry a disproportionate burden of HIV infection. Women and girls are most likely to become infected with HIV from unprotected sex with an infected male partner or by sharing unclean needles while injecting drugs.

HIV commonly goes unrecognized. About 25% of Maine adults and 50% of adolescents with HIV don't know they are infected, because they haven't been tested. More than half of new HIV infections are caused by people who are infected but untested and unaware of their infection. Individuals tested and treated earlier in their infection tend to have better health and quality of life than those testing late in their disease.

Women have unique issues and special challenges that make it harder for them to prevent HIV or take care of themselves if they have HIV:

- Women's bodies are different. A woman is twice as likely as a man to get HIV infection during vaginal sex.
- Women are at greater risk to be infected with an STD (often without symptoms), which increases their chances of getting HIV. If a woman is co-infected with an STD and HIV, she is more likely to pass HIV on to her partners.
- Women can give HIV to their babies during pregnancy, delivery, or breast feeding.
- Women may lack control in their relationships, making it harder to refuse sex or discuss safer sex options without fear of violence
- Women may not know if their partner is doing thing that put him (and therefore her) at risk for HIV, including injecting drugs or having risky sex with others
- Women may not earn much money, which makes it hard for them to pay doctors or even get a ride to their doctor appointments. In extreme instances, some women even end up trading sex for money or drugs.
- Women may be caregivers for others and not feel they have the time to take care of themselves or are unable to find someone to take care of their loved ones when they want to access health services.

Routine HIV testing ensures more people learn whether they are infected with HIV, allowing them to benefit from earlier access to treatment and reduce the risk of infecting their partners or to maintain preventive measures to keep from getting infected.

Maine CDC encourages both women and their communities to take action and observe National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day by:

- Getting tested
- Supporting routine HIV screening
- Holding screening events, health fairs
- Supporting women's access to health care and support services, as well as support women's roles as caregivers and mothers

Maine CDC supports several agencies in providing HIV testing for women and girls at high risk. Please visit our website for more information: www.MainePublicHealth.gov/HIV.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheila H. Pinette" followed by a stylized flourish.

Dr. Sheila Pinette
Director, Maine Center for Disease Control