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HIV/AIDS – Know the Facts

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In honor of World AIDS Day, which falls on the first of December each year, the community is urged to take the opportunity to learn about HIV and what is being done in the Eau Claire community to prevent the spread of the disease.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system and weakens a person's ability to fight infections. Unlike other viruses such as influenza or the common cold, the body cannot get rid of HIV. An infected individual often does not have symptoms during the early stages of HIV. Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the most advanced stage of HIV. At this stage, a person's immune system is badly damaged and the individual is extremely vulnerable to infections.

In 2012, Wisconsin had approximately 400 new reported cases of HIV. Reports indicate that 6,549 individuals with HIV infection were living in Wisconsin at the end of 2012. In Eau Claire County, 76 cases of HIV/AIDS have been reported from 1983 through 2012.

HIV is spread through infected bodily fluids most often via sexual contact or sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment. HIV is not spread through spitting, biting, or sharing utensils. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), nearly one in five persons with HIV does not know he or she is infected and can pass the virus on to others without knowing it.

It is important to protect yourself from getting and spreading HIV. If you are sexually active, limit the number of sexual partners you have and always use condoms. Do not share needles. Get yourself tested. The Eau Claire Health Department provides HIV testing. If you are interested in information on HIV or HIV testing, please contact the Health Department at 715-839-4718. Early detection of HIV infection can make a difference. Treatment is available that slows the disease progression and lessens the severity.

In addition to testing, the Eau Claire City-County Health Department also provides HIV Partner Services to people affected by HIV. HIV Partner Services assists HIV-infected persons in notifying their sexual and/or needle-sharing partners of the possible exposure to HIV. In 2014, the Eau Claire Health Department will begin to provide Partner Services for counties throughout northwestern Wisconsin. Partner Services are voluntary, client-centered, and strictly confidential. The Eau Claire Health

department works closely with the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) to provide consistent collaborative care.

“Collaborating with other counties in Wisconsin to provide HIV Partner Services benefits all involved”, states Lieske Giese, Director of the Eau Claire City-County Health Department. “HIV is a serious communicable disease and Partner Services is an essential program that can make a difference in limiting spread and assuring testing and treatment.”

For more information on HIV/AIDS including transmission, prevention, signs and symptoms, see www.cdc.gov/hiv.

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