

22 November 2012



From: Sir Bruce Keogh

To: Medical Directors

*Professor Sir Bruce Keogh  
NHS Medical Director*

Gateway reference: 18421

*Room 504  
Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
London SW1A 2NS*

Dear Colleague

### **National HIV Testing Week 23-30 November 2012**

I am writing seeking your support for National HIV Testing week.

During this important initiative, the Terrence Higgins Trust and other sexual health charities will be promoting the benefits of HIV testing to gay and bisexual men and African communities, who remain the population most at risk of HIV in England. Last year there were over 6,000 new diagnoses of HIV. Of these 47% were diagnosed late. A person is ten times more likely to die within a year if they are diagnosed late.

Diagnosed early the vast majority of people living with HIV can expect a near normal life expectancy thanks to the benefits of effective treatment and the excellent care provided by the NHS. Early diagnosis is also important so that people can make behavioural changes to prevent onward transmission to uninfected partners. Late diagnosis of HIV, that is after the point at which treatment is recommended, is also more costly to the NHS.

Members of the British HIV Association are supporting National HIV Testing Week by encouraging all hospital doctors and general practice to be alert to the need to offer and recommend an HIV test. This is especially important if their patient is from a group at increased risk of HIV or they present with symptoms or signs of HIV infection or non-specific symptoms such as malaise or weight loss.

Offering an HIV test is within the competence of all healthcare professionals and the requirement for lengthy pre-test counselling was dropped many years ago. Giving a positive result to a patient should be within the competence of all doctors, just as it is for any other serious life-long health condition. Support is also available from HIV clinicians. Information and resources to support increased HIV testing in general practice and in non-specialist hospital departments are available from the Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health<sup>1</sup> and through guidelines produced by the British HIV Association<sup>2</sup>. Further information about National HIV Testing Week can be found at: <http://www.tht.org.uk/our-charity/Campaign/National-HIV-Testing-Week/About-NHTW>

HIV testing today is quick and straightforward and we know from research funded by the Department of Health that offering an HIV test is acceptable to the wider population.<sup>3</sup> I urge you to bring HIV Testing Week to the attention of all doctors and encourage them to be alert to the benefits of HIV testing to both individuals and the wider public health.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Keogh', with a horizontal line drawn underneath the signature.

**SIR BRUCE KEOGH**  
**NHS MEDICAL DIRECTOR**

---

<sup>1</sup> For hospitals see: <http://www.medfash.org.uk/Projects/TacklingHIVtesting/THIVTHome.html>

For primary care see: <http://www.medfash.org.uk/publications>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bhiva.org/HIVTesting2008.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hpa.org.uk/Publications/InfectiousDiseases/HIVAndSTIs/1011TimetotestHIVtesting/>