



Jillian Skinner MP

Minister for Health Minister for Medical Research

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 26 November 2013

AUSTRALIAN-FIRST AS RAPID TESTING FOR HIV POPS UP IN DARLINGHURST

Health Minister Jillian Skinner today launched Australia's first pop-up rapid HIV testing site, which offers free tests and results within 30 minutes.

The caravan - which aims to promote the ease and importance of HIV testing to at-risk people - will operate in Taylor Square, Darlinghurst from tomorrow until Sunday, which is World AIDS Day.

It is a partnership between NSW Health, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, the Sydney Sexual Health Centre, ACON and SydPath.

"Making HIV testing easier is a priority of the *NSW Government's HIV Strategy 2012-2015*," Mrs Skinner said.

"NSW is at the forefront of innovative and effective responses to HIV. This pop-up testing van is an example of how we are adapting our policies and services to take advantage of new advances in HIV testing and treatment.

"Through these advances, as well as the continued promotion of safe behaviour, our goal of virtually eliminating HIV transmission by 2020 is within reach," she said.

NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant said while there are 18 established rapid testing centres in the state, the pop-up site is an eye-catching way to raise awareness.

There are plans to establish a similar pop-up testing site in Oxford Street in the lead-up to next year's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

"HIV testing is faster and easier than ever before. Rapid tests are now available on the spot and a result is available within 30 minutes," Dr Chant said.

"We encourage people at risk - especially men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and people who work in the sex industry - to take advantage of the site.

"Testing leads to early diagnosis, which enables early treatment. Antiretroviral treatment not only improves health and wellbeing but also reduces the risk of transmitting HIV to others."

The van will operate from tomorrow until Sunday at the following times:

- Wednesday 27 November to Friday 29 November - 4pm to 7pm
- Saturday November 30 & December 1 - 12 noon to 6pm

It will be manned by trained clinical staff from South Eastern Sydney Local Health District and ACON. No appointment is required.

“Testing is a simple process which involves a simple finger prick of blood, with results available within 30 minutes. Those tested can choose to wait at the site or go away and wait for a text message notifying them their results are ready.

“Compare this to a decade ago when people would be forced to wait anxiously for many days or weeks before an HIV test result was known.”

Those who test positive are accompanied to a nearby health centre for further blood tests and support.

The pop-up site is an adapted version of ACON’s a[TEST] model which provides rapid testing in community locations.

“We are excited to be partnering with NSW Health to promote HIV testing and rapid results,” ACON chief executive Nicholas Parkhill said.

“In 2012, there was a 24% rise in HIV infections in NSW, with 409 people diagnosed compared to 330 in 2011.

“Eighty one per cent of new infections were from homosexual contact, 14% from heterosexual contact and 2% due to injecting drug use,” he said.

Mrs Skinner said the pop-up van site is a perfect entree to World AIDS Day.

“For most of the 30 years of the global HIV epidemic, NSW has been a world leader in responding to HIV,” Mrs Skinner said.

“NSW Health has set ambitious targets to dramatically drive down HIV transmission by 2020. The only way this can be done is by partnerships with the health sector, community, government and researchers. Together we can make it happen,” she said.

Further information on the pop-up rapid HIV testing site can be found at www.health.nsw.gov.au/endinghiv

The NSW HIV Strategy 2012-2015 can be found at <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sexualhealth/Pages/hiv.aspx>