

PRESS RELEASE

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Local HIV/AIDS Advocates Seek to Engage All Residents for World AIDS Day & HIV/AIDS Awareness Month

Events honor survivors, remember lives lost, and encourage community participation in promulgating latest HIV/AIDS facts

SAN JOSE, CA – Local organizations and government agencies are coming together to recognize World AIDS Day and AIDS Awareness Month. Organizers (a full list can be found at www.worldaidsdaysv.org) strive to build awareness for local resources, inform the public of important HIV/AIDS facts and statistics, and drive community engagement and collaboration with this year's theme: **“Let's End HIV/AIDS Together.**

Education and awareness are getting to zero new HIV infections, zero HIV-related deaths, and zero HIV stigma/discrimination, the goal of the local Getting to Zero initiative. Organizers want the community to **get, know, and share the facts.**

One of the key takeaways for the public is that HIV can be a manageable disease thanks to modern science and medicine, but they should continue to treat prevention seriously, as there is no definitive cure. For this reason, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continue to encourage the public to get tested at least annually and share their status with their partners. This in combination with preventative strategies like condom usage and not sharing needles.

Currently, 70 percent of the people living with HIV in Santa Clara County are virally suppressed, meaning they are not able to pass HIV onto their partners. With consistent HIV medication, the HIV virus becomes undetectable in a person who has the virus, which means they have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to their sexual partners. This is critically important in bending the HIV curve to zero.

“To meet our goal of preventing new HIV infections and ending stigma, we must ensure that everyone has access to affordable medication, regardless of income,” said Dr. George Han, County of Santa Clara Public Health Department Deputy Health Officer. “Preventing and addressing HIV in the communities with the highest rates of HIV, which include LGBTQ and communities of color, is especially important and remains our highest priority.”

Communities of color remain disproportionately impacted by HIV. In 2018, the rate of new HIV diagnoses among African American and Latino men was nearly four times the rate among non-Hispanic white men. This disparity is likely due to social structures, physical environment, health services and other injustices.

People who do not have HIV but who are at high risk of getting it, can take a daily pill called PrEP, which is highly effective for preventing HIV if used as prescribed. Over 300 patients have started taking PrEP after receiving assistance from the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department.

Honored each December since 1988, World AIDS Day unites people worldwide in the fight against HIV and commemorates those who have died from AIDS-related illness. It's an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV, to show support for the estimated 37.9 million people living with HIV, and to honor the 32 million individuals who have died from an AIDS-related illness, including the 17 locally who passed in 2018.

One of the easiest ways to help as a community member is by supporting fellow residents who have been directly impacted by the disease by paying respects and listening to personal stories at one of the **local events that will take place on December 1 and 3 in San Jose.**

The Celebration of Life and Light will be hosted at the Children's Discovery Museum Theatre to raise awareness and funds to support the local AIDS Memorial Grove adjacent to the museum. The event will consist of a program of music, speakers, and short silence for those in the Light. Attendees can learn about local HIV/AIDS initiatives from local speakers, emceed by Santa Clara County Supervisor Cindy Chavez. The event begins at 2 p.m. on Sunday, December 1.

On December 3, sections of The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt will be on display at San Jose City Hall and will be available for public visit following the red ribbon flag raising ceremony at 12 p.m. until the end of the remembrance ceremony and candle light vigil that evening.

At 7 p.m. December 3, the Remembrance Ceremony and Candlelight Vigil will honor HIV/AIDS survivors, remembers loved ones lost, and celebrates the medical advancements in prevention, detection, and treatment of the disease. Come hear first-hand stories from community members and listen as community leaders speak on the state of HIV/AIDS today. The evening will conclude with a candlelight vigil. San José City Hall will be lit red in recognition.

Community members can help by spreading the word about local services, sharing updated facts and statistics found at www.worldaidsdaysv.org, getting tested for HIV regularly, wearing a red ribbon during December in recognition of AIDS Awareness Month, participating at World AIDS Day 2019 events, or getting involved with any of the many organizations involved with HIV/AIDS awareness and services.

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About Getting to Zero

Getting to Zero HIV (GTZ) Santa Clara County-Silicon Valley is a four-year initiative that will strive for Zero New HIV Infections, Zero Deaths related to HIV/AIDS, and Zero HIV/AIDS Stigma and Discrimination in Santa Clara County. It is a collaborative effort between the County of Santa Clara and community partners, including The Health Trust, with funding provided by Santa Clara County. To learn more visit www.gettingtozeroscc.org.

About the Santa Clara County Public Health Department

The County of Santa Clara Public Health Department focuses on protecting and improving the health of communities through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, disease and injury

prevention, and the promotion of sound health policy. To learn more about how the Public Health Department serves the people who live, work, study, and play in Santa Clara County, please visit our website, sccphd.org, and follow us on Facebook, facebook.com/sccpublichealth.

About Project MORE

Project MORE Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit serving the LGBTQ+ community of Northern California by that strives to improve the quality of life of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) community by empowering inclusion within a compassionate and safe environment through cultural activities, creative community outreach, education, and advocacy projects. For more information, visit www.doMOREproject.org.

About The HIV Commission

The primary purpose of the Santa Clara County HIV Commission shall be to assist with the development of a client-centered, comprehensive continuum of care for persons at risk for or living with HIV disease in the Santa Clara County. The mission of the Commission is to support and enhance an effective, compassionate and comprehensive system of HIV prevention and care services to all people living in Santa Clara County