

For Immediate Release | February 13, 2012

## HIV testing and Cupid's arrow should go together, says Vancouver Coastal and Providence Health

VANCOUVER, BC – All love is risky and Vancouver Coastal Health and Providence Health Care are encouraging sweethearts young and old to update their understanding of HIV transmission, testing and treatment and seriously consider making HIV testing part of their regular health care routine.

“There are an estimated 3,500 people living in BC who are not aware they are HIV-positive. An estimated one in four HIV-positive people don't know they have it. Many people may believe they are not at high risk for HIV, but testing is now recommended for any adult who has ever had sex,” said Dr. Réka Gustafson, medical health officer and director of communicable disease control in Vancouver.

Research shows that HIV-positive people who know about their diagnosis are 3.5 times less likely to transmit the virus. And once they receive appropriate treatment, they are 96 per cent less likely to transmit the virus.

Unfortunately, evidence also shows that most people newly diagnosed with HIV have had many missed opportunities for testing, including visits to their family doctors, clinics or hospitals. People are often unaware of their risk or don't feel comfortable talking about it with their health care providers, so aren't tested.

As a result, HIV infection is not being diagnosed early enough, delaying lifesaving treatment for those who are infected, and resulting in unnecessary transmission of the virus to others. Early diagnosis allows for early treatment which enables people to live long, healthy lives and look forward to careers and having families.

“Testing is quick, simple and confidential, and there are options for a 60-second screening test. Low risk is not the same as no risk. Testing makes sense for everyone as it is the only way to know. Give the gift of love this Valentine's Day – go to a clinic or ask your doctor for a test at your next visit,” added Dr. Gustafson.

HIV testing is available through your family doctor and at a number of sites. To find out where they are, go to [www.itsdifferentnow.org](http://www.itsdifferentnow.org).

For information specifically about rapid screening sites, go to: <http://vancouverstophiv.com/access-testing/>.

A social media marketing campaign, “It's Different Now,” is underway and has featured bus shelter ads, urban posters, a dedicated website with videos, a Facebook page and

Twitter presence to build awareness about how HIV transmission, testing and treatment has radically changed over the last five to 10 years.

VCH is responsible for the delivery of \$2.9 billion in community, hospital and residential care to more than one million people in communities including Richmond, Vancouver, the North Shore, Sunshine Coast, Sea to Sky corridor, Powell River, Bella Bella and Bella Coola.

Providence Health Care is one of Canada's largest faith-based health care organizations, operating 16 health care facilities in Greater Vancouver. PHC operates one of two adult academic health science centres in the province, performs cutting-edge research in more than 30 clinical specialties, and focuses its services on six "populations of emphasis": cardio-pulmonary risks and illnesses, HIV/AIDS, mental health, renal risks and illness, specialized needs in aging and urban health and is home to the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS.

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