

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Hepatitis C a Leading Killer for Individuals Living with HIV/AIDS
Special testing offered for May's Hepatitis Awareness Month

Eugene, OR – Hepatitis C is one of the leading killers of Americans living with HIV/AIDS, and one of the top 10 killers of all Americans over age 25. HIV Alliance is no stranger to the devastating impact of the Hepatitis C virus (HCV) that is spread through blood and attacks the liver. One third of the agency's HIV-positive clients also struggle with HCV infection, and the majority of clients who utilize HIV Alliance's Needle Exchange Program are affected.

Since January 2008, HIV Alliance has provided Hepatitis C testing to high-risk groups as part of a pilot study for the State of Oregon. When a test result is positive, staff provides immediate risk reduction counseling to help individuals stay healthy for as long as possible and take precautions against spreading the disease to others. The agency's Needle Exchange Program is instrumental in preventing the spread of HCV by dramatically reducing the number of people who are sharing infected needles.

“People frequently come to us with misconceptions or a lack of education about Hepatitis C,” says Jeff Nichols, Needle Exchange Coordinator. “We are able to reduce their fear and give them the tools they need to make positive choices. I've seen a real turnaround for many people: they learn they are infected and make a commitment to more healthy choices in their lives.”

On Tuesday, May 19th, World Hepatitis C Day, HIV Alliance will be offering free Hepatitis C testing to high risk groups from 2 p.m. – 5 p.m.

HIV Alliance has prevented new HIV infections and supported individuals living with HIV/AIDS for the past 15 years. In collaboration with volunteers and community partners, HIV Alliance assists and supports people of all cultures by offering health care and advocacy to those living with and affected by HIV. HIV Alliance also provides community education, outreach information and services to empower individuals to make healthy choices. For more information, visit www.hivalliance.org.

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