



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **WORLD AIDS DAY 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2018**

World AIDS Day takes place on 1st December every year to raise awareness of the fight against HIV/AIDS and show support to the HIV community. It is estimated that over 36.5 million people across the world are living with HIV.

In England, around 90,000 people are living with HIV, with 12% unaware they are HIV positive. This means that one in eight people living with HIV don't know they have the virus. Although the HIV epidemic is slowing in the UK, nearly half of people who test positive are finding out they have HIV very late, meaning the virus may have damaged their health permanently. The risk of death and disease is greatly increased in people diagnosed late.

In contrast, people who are diagnosed early with HIV and receive effective antiretroviral therapy (ART) medication will have a normal life expectancy. They are also protected from passing HIV on to others because effective treatment reduces the virus in the body to an undetectable, untransmissible level.

There are various circumstances whereby HIV may be transmitted from one person to another, such as:

- Sexual contact that involves semen, pre-ejaculatory fluid, vaginal fluids, rectal mucus or blood;
- direct blood contact, particularly through sharing injection drug needles; and
- mother to baby (before or during birth, or while breastfeeding through breast milk).

The GHA's Well Person Unit, located at the Primary Care Centre, offers confidential and anonymised testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Persons wishing to book an appointment may do so by telephoning 20007842, or via the MyGHA Automated Phone System, on 20007007.

Dr Lynsey Dunckley, Sexual and Reproductive Health Doctor, has reinforced the importance of regular sexual health screening, including HIV: "The HIV test is a simple blood test and is offered to everyone. It is much better to know that you have HIV, so that the appropriate treatment can be



started early, therefore avoiding later complications. The Well Person Unit, importantly, provides persons in our community who may feel concerned about sexually transmitted infections and wish to get tested, or simply wish to have a routine check-up, the opportunity to do so in a confidential and anonymised setting. It also serves to offer non-judgmental advice on preventative measures that persons should take to avoid contracting and transmitting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. We must not forget the very important message to use condoms to protect against HIV and other infections. I would therefore encourage members of the public, who wish to undergo screening for sexually transmitted infections to make an appointment with the Well Person Unit.”

Minister for Health, Care and Justice, the Honourable Neil F. Costa MP added: “To coincide with World AIDS day, I am pleased to announce the introduction of ‘Point of Care Testing’ at the GHA. These tests will be available, for the first time, to individuals who may feel anxious about a possible positive diagnosis, or who are apprehensive about blood tests. This test is performed in the clinic and gives a result within minutes. It is carried out using a ‘finger prick’ sample of blood and will detect most infections within 6 weeks of exposure to HIV. An additional test is then offered to all patients at 3 months to definitively exclude HIV infection. I wish to sincerely thank Dr Dunkley, Ms Suzanne Romero, Clinical Nurse Manager at the Primary Care Centre, and Dr Krish Rawal, Director at the Primary Care Centre, for their excellent work in establishing and developing this crucial service.”