

### HIV Outbreak in Thunder Bay

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit is declaring a HIV outbreak that is centered in the homeless/under-housed population in the city of Thunder Bay. There has been a recent spike of cases in May and June bringing the total number since January 1<sup>st</sup> to 8 cases with 2 additional cases under investigation. There are likely further cases that have not yet been diagnosed. Transmission is through sexual activity and sharing needles for drug use. People who share injection drug equipment and those involved in sex-trade are at a higher risk of contracting HIV. More than half the cases are women of reproductive age therefore vertical transmission between mother and child is a risk.

*Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)* is a virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases. It is spread by being in contact with certain bodily fluids of a person with HIV, most commonly through sharing injection drug equipment or unprotected sex. If left untreated, HIV can lead to the disease called *acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)*. AIDS is the late stage of HIV infection that occurs when the body's immune system is badly damaged because of the virus.

The human body cannot get rid of HIV and no effective HIV cure exists. However, by taking HIV medication, people with HIV can live healthy lives and prevent transmitting the virus.

In response to this outbreak, the TBDHU would appreciate your assistance with the following:

- **Increase testing** Test people that are at risk for contracting HIV. Individuals at risk include people who use injection drugs, under-housed/homeless and those involved in the sex trade. Anonymous HIV testing is available through the TBDHU. Please call the Sexual Health clinic at 625-5976 for more information.
- **Start or refer for treatment** Antiretroviral therapy (ART) reduces HIV-related morbidity and mortality and reduces HIV transmission.
- **Offer harm reduction supplies** Harm reduction supplies are available at many locations throughout the city. You can find a list on the TBDHU website or call Superior Points at 625-7861.
- **Connect clients** Connect clients to resources in our community that can provide support. Call 211 for a current list of services in Thunder Bay.
- Under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, **confirmed cases should be reported** to the TBDHU Sexual Health Program (625-5900 or 1-888-294-6630).

For more information, please call the TBDHU at 625-5900 or visit our website at <https://www.tbdhu.com>