HIV/AIDS Myths and Realities

Today there are more than one million people living with HIV in the U.S., but one in five people don’t know they have it. As a response to this startling statistic, June 27th is recognized as National HIV Testing Day, in an effort to promote HIV testing across the country.

In addition to getting tested, one of the ways we can take action is by dispelling myths that surround the virus, which helps eliminate the stigma and correct misperceptions. Take a minute to start an open dialogue with your loved ones and join NHCOA in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Myth: HIV is a contagious disease, like a flu or common cold.
Reality: HIV is not transmitted through saliva, sneezes, or sweat. Casual contact, such as shaking hands, sharing utensils, or kissing, doesn’t transmit the virus either.

Myth: People living with HIV don’t look healthy.
Reality: People living with HIV (PLWH) can look no different from any other person for several years after being infected with the virus, and may continue infecting others until they develop AIDS with deadly complications. On the other hand, PLWH who get treated can have a good quality of life and never come to develop AIDS.

Myth: Older adults are immune to HIV.
Reality: Anyone can get infected with HIV at any point in their lives. In fact, almost 25% of the people living with HIV/AIDS are 50 years or older.

Myth: Once you are infected with HIV, you will get AIDS right away.
Reality: Those who get tested early, start getting treated upon learning their HIV-positive status, and stick to the treatment, can potentially live the rest of their lives without developing AIDS.

Myth: There is no point in getting treated for HIV, I will die anyways.
Reality: Breakthroughs in medical treatments, are allowing PLWH who are under treatment to keep the virus (load) count very low and live their lives with HIV as a chronic disease.