



ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL HEALTH CONSORTIUM

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Self-testing kits Connect Alaskans to Sexual Health Services

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) have focused resources aimed at reducing barriers to testing for HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In observance of World AIDS Awareness Day, Wednesday, Dec. 1, ANTHC and DHSS strongly encourage Alaskans to seek HIV and STI testing options, such as those offered through ANTHC's holistic wellness website iknowmine.org. This easy-to-access service bridges the gap for many people living in remote and rural areas of Alaska where access to testing may be limited or there are [concerns about privacy and confidentiality](#). While HIV positive results do need to be confirmed with an in-person appointment, self-tests can limit lengthy travel and clinic visits while [increasing access](#) to testing.

“The goal is for HIV and STI testing to become a regular practice that people feel comfortable talking about. Hopefully, individuals who test will share their experience and encourage others in their social networks, so they get tested also” stated Hannah Warren, ANTHC HIV/STD Prevention Program Manager. “Whether used as part of routine health care or due to potential exposure, these self-tests offer individuals and their sexual partners discreet options to stay informed about their health status. In honor of World AIDS Awareness Day, we encourage Alaskans to order their free self-testing kit through the iknowmine.org website.”

The kits use a self-swab method, allowing users to test when and where it is most convenient. A nurse case manager is connected with each user, ensuring that individuals have the support needed to accurately use and interpret the test, know who to follow-up with regarding results and to answer any questions pertaining to the kit, including safe-sex and risk-reduction counseling. “The feedback I hear most is that people appreciate this service and that they are thankful for the kit they can use at home,” said Lisa Rea, one of the nursing case managers. “The follow up is especially important for patients with positive results, so they can get treated right away, reducing problems for them and decreasing the transmission to others. It is also important for patients who are negative to know their results.”

With reported cases of [HIV](#) and [STIs](#) on the rise, access to these resources is crucial and helps to inform health care and lifestyle decisions. According to HIV.gov, “in the United States, HIV is spread mainly through having anal or vaginal sex or sharing needles or syringes with [a person that is HIV positive.]” A challenge in HIV and STI prevention is that many people might not be aware that they could be at-risk for HIV or STI transmission. Groups [at greater risk for HIV](#) include people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, people who exchange sex for money or drugs and people with another active or untreated STI. Early HIV detection and diagnosis has a [substantially positive impact](#) on health outcomes and prevents hospitalizations.

These and other resources are available through ANTHC's holistic wellness website, iknowmine.org. Anyone with an Alaska mailing address can order from the site at no cost to the end users. Visit iknowmine.org/sti-testing-for-more-information.