



REMARKS

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH

THE HONOURABLE KIM N. WILSON, JP, MP

World AIDS Day

On Friday 30 November 2018, 12:30pm

City Hall Steps

Good afternoon,

Tomorrow, December 1st marks World AIDS Day 2018, and I am happy to be here today to celebrate as we unite against HIV - to show support for people living with HIV, and to remember those who have died from an AIDS-related illnesses.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the first World AIDS Day and the theme “Know your status” reminds us that although this is a treatable disease, if you don’t know that you are living with HIV, you cannot start treatment. So it is really, truly important for everyone to be tested for HIV and know your status.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 get tested for HIV at least once as part of routine healthcare.

Knowing one’s HIV status, and early diagnosis, are important to ensure we can stay healthy and reduce the spread of the virus.

Persons at increased risk of HIV should get tested more often, at least annually, depending on their level of risk.

Persons who can be at increased risk include those who have had more than one sexual partner since their last HIV test; persons who have been diagnosed or sought treatment for another sexually transmitted infection; and persons who have sex with a partner with an unknown HIV status. Think about these risk factors carefully and ask yourself truthfully, whether they apply to you. If the answer is yes, you can have completely confidential testing and rest your mind at ease.

There are currently around 300 persons known to be living with HIV in Bermuda, ranging in age from under 20 to over 65. Over 70% are male and around 80% of persons living with HIV in Bermuda are identified with sexual contact as a risk factor.

The great news is that we continue to have had no mother-to-child transmissions of HIV in over 20 years. This is a remarkable achievement for the country, and it is thanks to the dedicated Department of Health staff and our healthcare partners that we have accomplished this globally coveted achievement. Bermuda's healthcare professionals are to be congratulated.

Through their hard work and dedication, Bermuda has made tremendous strides and we have seen great progress.

However, HIV has not gone away, and the Department of Health continues to provide public education so that younger generations have an increased awareness of the risks, and are sensitive to the needs of those living with or affected by HIV.

I cannot stress enough the importance of getting tested for HIV, if you haven't already. Do not put it off . . . getting tested is the only way of knowing your status for sure. Being diagnosed and starting treatment at an early stage ensures that you have a better chance of living a long and healthy life.

World AIDS Day is a day to reflect on how far we have come and it is also an opportunity to focus on raising awareness and understanding of the disease and knowing one's status, as we stand in solidarity with those living with HIV.

Again, I encourage everyone to get tested and *know your status*. You can have the test done by your doctor or you can go to the Communicable Disease Control Clinic at the Hamilton Health Centre. Testing at the Communicable Disease Control Clinic is fully confidential and free of charge.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge our Communicable Disease Control team, public health nurses and nurse epidemiologist, who provide care and health counselling to persons living with HIV/AIDS. I personally value what you do tremendously, and it brings me great pride to be part of your dedicated and accomplished team.

Let's continue to work towards an HIV free Bermuda.

Thank You.