

## PRESS RELEASE

### **“Halve It” coalition welcomes new NICE guidance on HIV testing in men who have sex with men.**

“Halve It”, a broad coalition of experts and advocates in HIV welcomed the new guidance as a major step forward in helping to halve the proportion of people undiagnosed with HIV. New NICE guidance, published today, recommends an expansion of HIV testing in clinical and community settings in areas of high prevalence to help reduce undiagnosed infection and prevent transmission among men who have sex with men.

The coalition, whose membership includes, the British HIV Association (BHIVA), British Association for Sexual Health & HIV (BASHH), the Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health (MedFASH), Terrence Higgins Trust, the National AIDS Trust (NAT) and the National HIV Nurses Association (NHVNA) calls upon all levels of government to halve the proportion of people diagnosed late with HIV (with a CD4 count <350mm<sup>3</sup>) and to halve the proportion of people living undiagnosed within 5 years.

Dr Ian Williams, a founder member of “Halve It” and chair of the British HIV association welcomed the guidelines: “We very much welcome these guidelines and hope that they are a catalyst to wider testing in a broad range of healthcare and community settings. We firmly believe that the early diagnosis of HIV is of significant benefit to both personal and public health. We look forward to their full implementation.”

Halve It is a coalition of HIV and healthcare experts who are determined to tackle the continued public health challenges posed by HIV.

Our members represent the following organisations:

- African Health Policy Network
- All-Party Parliamentary Group on HIV and AIDS
- British Association for Sexual Health and HIV
- British HIV Association
- Gilead Sciences Ltd
- London Sexual Health Programme
- Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health (MedFASH)
- National AIDS Trust



- National HIV Nurses Association
- Sex, Drugs and HIV Group of the Royal College of General Practitioners
- Terrence Higgins Trust

There are over 22,000 people in the UK who are HIV positive but do not know it, and of those who are diagnosed, more than half are diagnosed late<sup>1</sup>. “Halve It” is working to halve the proportion of people living with undiagnosed HIV and halve the number of people diagnosed late with HIV over the next five years.

The “Halve It” coalition calls upon all levels of government to:

1. Make HIV a public health priority both locally and nationally.
2. Ensure HIV is given appropriate priority on the ground by requiring that it is systematically considered in local health needs assessments and health planning processes.
3. Offer healthcare practices incentives to test for HIV
4. Strengthen the relationship between national surveillance and local reporting of HIV testing by enhancing local HIV reporting procedures and maintaining a world class national surveillance capability.

Halving undiagnosed HIV by 2015 will mean fewer new HIV infections, fewer early deaths and more money saved by the NHS at a time when every penny counts. The campaign recognises that early testing for HIV can save lives and prevent onward transmission and calls on the government to make HIV a public health priority.

The “Halve It” Coalition has been funded and supported by Gilead Sciences Ltd and the British HIV Association (BHIVA).

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## Notes for Editors

### HIV – a priority for public health

In 2009, a total of 65,319<sup>1</sup> people were known to be living with HIV in the UK. However, with almost a quarter of people unaware that they have been infected, independent estimates suggest that the real number of people living with the virus in 2009 was 86,500<sup>1</sup>. Of the 6,630 individuals newly diagnosed with HIV in 2009, 42% (2,760) probably acquired their infection through sex between men<sup>1</sup>.

HIV is a serious and incurable condition. It can result in the destruction of the body's immune system and a progressive increase in illness including blindness, heart and kidney disease, osteoporosis, some cancers and brain impairment. Some people with HIV become wheelchair-bound or require major interventions such as hip replacement. Ultimately it can cause premature death.

The sooner HIV is diagnosed, the sooner appropriate care can begin. Thanks to modern treatments, the life expectancy of someone living with HIV has increased markedly in recent years. Indeed recent research has found that a person diagnosed with HIV at the age of 35, with prompt access to treatment can expect to live to the age of 72<sup>2</sup>.

Earlier diagnosis and prompt treatment of HIV reduces onward transmission. This not only avoids illness and early deaths but has the potential to deliver huge financial savings. It has been estimated that the prevention of just one HIV infection saves the public purse between £280,000 and £360,000 in direct lifetime healthcare costs<sup>3</sup>. Had all of the 3,550 UK acquired infections in 2008 been prevented there would have been a saving of approximately £1.1 billion in direct healthcare costs<sup>3</sup>. This figure does not include additional indirect costs such as social care, time off work and cost of benefits, or any savings made as a result of reduced onward transmission.

The guidance is available on the NICE website [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/PH34](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/PH34) from 23.03. 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> Health Protection Agency. HIV in the UK: 2010 report  
[http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb\\_C/1287145367237](http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1287145367237). Publication date November 2010.  
Accessed 18 March 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Health Protection Agency: SOPHID Table SHABA: Diagnosed HIV-infected black-African individuals seen for care by area of residence, United Kingdom: 2000-2010

<sup>3</sup> HPA, HIV in the UK: 2009 Report,  
<http://www.hpa.org.uk/Publications/InfectiousDiseases/HIVAndSTIs/0911HIVUK2009Report/>. Publication date November 2009, Accessed 18 March 2011

