GMHC to Offer Rapid Hepatitis C Testing in Addition to HIV Services

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Starting this week, GMHC in New York City will provide rapid hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing and linkage to care as part of its wide array of health services for people with HIV, those at risk and the LGBT community. The move to begin testing for this common co-infection is part of the organization's goal to help end AIDS as an epidemic across New York state by 2020, according to a recent GMHC press release.

Testing will begin at GMHC's David Geffen Center for HIV Prevention and Health Education on 224 West 29th Street in Manhattan using the OraQuick HCV Rapid Test, which takes just 20 minutes to conduct and is up to 98 percent accurate at detecting hepatitis C antibodies. The move was made possible through a recent approval from the New York State Department of Health's Clinical Laboratory Evaluation Program.

GMHC's hepatitis C testing is intended to target at-risk individuals seeking HIV or sexual health services at the organization—including the children of HCV-positive mothers, injection drug users, health care workers and individuals who engage in high-risk sexual behavior or have a history of sexually transmitted infections. HCV is a leading cause of death for people with HIV, and deaths from hepatitis C in this country recently surpassed those from HIV.

"We cannot end AIDS as an epidemic if we do not address hepatitis C," said GMHC CEO Kelsey Louie in a recent statement about the new testing program, noting that up to 50 percent of people living with hepatitis C today are currently unaware that they are infected.

Fortunately, HCV is treatable, and in most cases can be cured upon diagnosis. Under GMHC's new program, individuals who test positive will be immediately linked to health care services that will ultimately refer them to treatment for the condition.

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