Late-breaking News: The Real Viral Threat

With HIV meds, positive people live full, healthy lives. But what if you don't know you have HIV?

September 3, 2010 By Laura Whitehorn

During the past 20 years, the drugs available for treating HIV have advanced with what seems like lightning speed. But in at least one way, we're still back in the old days: trying to convince people to be tested for HIV so they can make use of those drugs.

HIV meds work best if a positive person starts taking them before the virus has had time to damage the immune system. But if people don't get tested for HIV until they've had the virus for many years, the chances of starting meds with a strong immune system—and having the drugs boost a person's health—plummet. That's why AIDS advocates and federal health agencies urge people to get tested.

But in many communities, including those populated by African Americans, the message isn't getting through. Recent research showed that from January 1997 through December 2007, among nearly 45,000 people who started HIV care, more than half of them were late—meaning their lab tests indicated they should already have been taking meds.

Starting HIV medications after the virus has already damaged the immune system increases the risk of developing AIDS. Late diagnosis may also increase the risk for cardiovascular disease and certain cancers.

Get tested, get into care, and get well—now.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/Late-breaking-News-The-Real-Viral-Threat-19034-9530