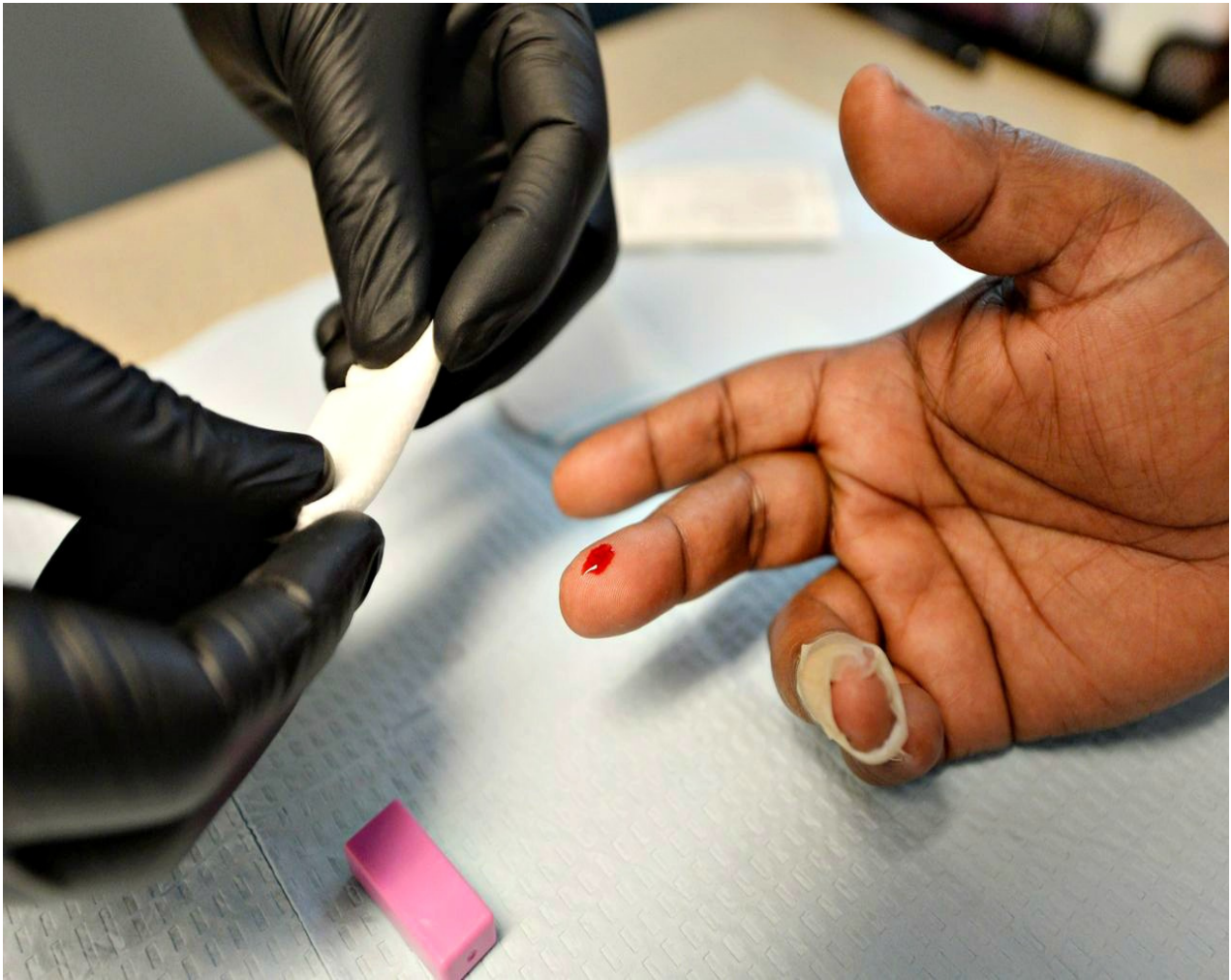


The Virgin Islands Consortium

About 600 U.S.V.I. Residents Know They Have H.I.V.; Another 600 Don't, C.D.C. Says

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ST. CROIX -- About 600 residents in the U.S. Virgin Islands are aware of their H.I.V. positive status, with only a quarter of that number currently receiving care. Another 600 are infected but are unaware, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics, relayed to media by Shamari Haynes, a C.D.C. outreach specialist working at Frederiksted Health Care, Inc.

The numbers were revealed upon request as part of Frederiksted Health Care's [National H.I.V. Testing Day](#), held annually to help raise awareness and bring to the fore the importance of knowing one's status.

The breakdown in numbers did not include a per-island count, Mr. Haynes said; a critical statistic that could have given a clearer understanding about the impact of H.I.V. in the territory. Some universal statistics include higher H.I.V. infection rates among Latinos, Blacks, Gays and bisexual men.

It's been scientifically proven that anal sex is riskier than vaginal sex when it comes to H.I.V. In fact, it's 18 times riskier. There are two reasons for this: First, the cells in the buttocks are much more susceptible to H.I.V. than cells in the vagina. Second, both semen and rectal mucosa (the lining of the buttocks) carry more H.I.V. than vaginal fluid.

You're **18 times more likely** to contract HIV through unprotected anal sex compared to unprotected vaginal sex.



Unprotected
Vaginal Sex



Unprotected
Anal Sex

Even so, Mr. Haynes said living with H.I.V. has become much easier as advances in medicine have made it possible to live healthy and long with the illness. He said there was a constant flow of individuals yesterday looking to know their status, and noted that the decision to get tested could sometimes be daunting.

Local officials, among them Senators Kenneth Gittens and Novelle Francis, as well as Deputy Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Neelia Ross, took the test to help raise awareness.

"Aside from obvious reasons of getting tested, it's my future," Ms. Ross said. "I'm single but I would like to get married and have a family. So I think it's extremely important to know my status and to be safe, and to take precautions regardless of the outcome."

Mr. Gittens encouraged residents to get tested.

"This day was established and is observed in the Virgin Islands as an annual observance to promote H.I.V, testing" Mr. Gittens said in a post on his [Facebook page](#). "The theme this year is "Doing It". This is a particularly important time for you to get involved. A time to know your status, a time to start protecting your negative status."

Mr. Haynes said Frederiksted Health Care sees at least one person everyday seeking to know their H.I.V. status, but he admitted that that amount was not enough.