

# HEALTH

## For Your Health



BY NEYAL J.  
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You lock away your valuables to keep them safe. But there's one valuable you may have forgotten: Your sight. If you are African American age 40 or older, have diabetes, or have a family history of glaucoma, you are at higher risk.

Glaucoma is a group of diseases that can damage the optic nerve of the eye and result in vision loss and blindness. Primary open-angle glaucoma is the most common form. In this condition, fluid builds up in the front chamber of the eye, and the optic nerve is damaged by the resulting increase in eye pressure.

"Glaucoma affects more than two million people nationwide and is a leading cause of vision loss and blindness in African Americans. In fact, African Americans are at risk of developing it at an earlier age. Glaucoma has no early warning signs or symptoms, and most people don't know this," said Dr. James Tsai, chair of the Glaucoma Subcommittee for the National Eye Institute (NEI) National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP). "It's very important that people don't wait until they no-

## Stop Glaucoma from Taking Your Sight

tice a problem with their vision to have an eye exam."

As glaucoma progresses, a person may eventually notice his or her side vision decreasing. If the disease is left untreated, the field of vision narrows and vision loss may result. "Most studies show that at least half of all persons with glaucoma don't know they have this potentially blinding disease," said Dr. Paul Sieving, director of NEI, National Institutes of Health.

"Glaucoma can be detected through a comprehensive dilated eye exam. NEI encourages all people at higher risk of glaucoma - African Americans age 40 and older; every-

one age 60, especially Mexican Americans; and those with a family history of glaucoma - to get a dilated eye exam every one to two years, because early detection and treatment may save your sight."

A comprehensive dilated eye exam is a painless procedure. Drops are placed in your eyes to dilate, or widen, the pupils. This allows your eye care professional to see inside your eye and examine the optic nerve for signs of damage and other vision problems.

If you have Medicare, are African American age 50 or older, and have diabetes or a family history of glaucoma, you may be eligible for a

low-cost, comprehensive dilated eye exam through the Medicare benefit for eye health.

Call 1-800-MEDICARE or visit [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) for more information. To find out about other possible financial assistance for eye care, visit [www.nei.nih.gov/health/financialaid.asp](http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/financialaid.asp).

Keep vision in your future. For more information about glaucoma, visit [www.nei.nih.gov/glaucoma](http://www.nei.nih.gov/glaucoma) or call NEI at 301-496-5248.

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## Free Tests for AIDS Prevention

### Increased access to AIDS test available at local pharmacies

(AP)—Getting an AIDS test at the drugstore could become as common as a flu shot or blood pressure check, if a new pilot program takes off.

The \$1.2 million program will offer the free rapid HIV tests at pharmacies and in-store clinics in 24 cities and rural communities, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced Tuesday.

"We believe we can reach more people by making testing more accessible and reduce the stigma associated with HIV," Dr. Kevin

Fenton, who oversees the agency's HIV prevention programs, said in a statement.

The tests are already available at seven places, including Washington, D.C., Oakland, Calif., and an Indian health service clinic in Montana. The CDC will soon pick 17 more locations.

The HIV test is a swab inside the mouth; it takes about 20 minutes for a preliminary result. The test maker says it's correct 99 percent of the time. If the test is positive for the AIDS virus, pharmacy employees will refer customers to

a local health department or other health care providers for a lab blood test to confirm the results, counseling and treatment. The workers are expected to deliver the news face-to-face and give customers privacy, the CDC said.

An estimated 1.1 million Americans are infected with HIV, but as many as 20 percent of them don't know they carry the virus, according to the CDC. It can take a decade or more for an infection to cause symptoms and illness.

Since 2006, the CDC has recommended that all Americans ages 13 to 64 get tested at least once, not just those considered at highest risk: gay men and intravenous drug users. But fewer than half of



Walgreen's pharmacy manager Sarah Freedman stands in her store in Washington, Tuesday, June 26, 2012. Would you go to a pharmacy to get tested for the AIDS virus? Health officials want to know. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Tuesday announced a \$1.2 million pilot project to offer free rapid HIV tests at pharmacies and clinics in 24 cities and rural communities. (AP Photo)



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adults younger than 65 have been tested, according to the agency's most recent statistics.

Each location will get enough tests to check 200 to 300 people. Made by OraSure Technologies Inc., the \$17.50 test is the only government-approved rapid HIV test that uses saliva. Other rapid tests on the market analyze a finger-prick blood sample. The tests are used routinely in doctor's offices, hospitals and clinics.

The OraSure swab test's stick-like testing device is used to wipe the inside of the mouth, then it is put in a solution, said company spokesman Ron Ticho. If two lines appear, that indicates a positive test.

The test is sold in about 40 countries, including Mexico, Italy, South Korea and South Africa. Ticho said he is not aware of another country where pharmacies routinely offer the testing.

The company is seeking government approval to sell it over-the-counter for home testing. A decision is expected later this year.