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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Public Health Officials Investigate HIV and Viral Hepatitis Among Injection Drug Users in Shelby County**

*Injection Drug Users Cautioned Not to Share Needles; Urged to Get Tested*

SIDNEY – The Sidney-Shelby County Health Department (SSCHD) with assistance from the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and regional public health and community partners is investigating HIV and viral hepatitis infections among injection drug users in Shelby County.

Three people who reported sharing needles with others during injection drug use recently tested positive for HIV, and two of the three also tested positive for viral hepatitis. Both types of infection may be spread through the high-risk practice of sharing needles and other injection equipment such as cookers, syringes, rinse water and cotton balls, during drug use. Such infections also can be spread through unsafe sex practices.

To help reduce risk of HIV and viral hepatitis infection, avoid:

- Injection drug use
- Sharing or re-using needles and other drug injection equipment
- Engaging in unprotected sex
- Engaging in sex with commercial sex workers

Public health staff interviewed the three people to identify sexual partners and individuals with whom they have shared needles during injection drug use. In a process called “contact tracing,” public health staff are following up with these exposed individuals to offer free testing for HIV and viral hepatitis as well as for syphilis which also may be spread by sharing needles. Individuals who test positive will be given medical treatment options, and drug users will be given substance abuse counseling options.

“Injection drug users should never share needles because of the risk of contracting and spreading infectious diseases like HIV and hepatitis,” said ODH Medical Director Dr. Mary DiOrio. “If you’ve shared a needle or other drug injection equipment with someone, you should get tested for HIV and hepatitis, as should your sexual partners.”

At-risk individuals can arrange for free local HIV, viral hepatitis and syphilis testing by calling the Ohio HIV/STD Hotline at (800) 332-2437 Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Any individuals with questions about this issue also can call the hotline, which is funded by ODH. More information about HIV, hepatitis and sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis is available on ODH’s website at [odh.ohio.gov](http://odh.ohio.gov).

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**NOTE TO NEWS MEDIA: ODH will post updated total confirmed HIV and hepatitis cases each day at 10 a.m. Monday through Friday for the duration of the investigation at**

**<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/bid/hivsurv/Shelby%20County%20Updates.aspx>.**

