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PRESS RELEASE

Tested negative? Stay that way!

GMFA produces new booklet to help gay men who have tested HIV negative to stay HIV negative

LONDON, 27 May 2009 – You pluck up the courage to go for an HIV test. The result comes back and it is good news – you're HIV negative; you haven't been infected with HIV. You might think that that's the happy ending, but for many gay men it isn't. A number of recent studies have shown that the majority of gay men who are diagnosed with HIV have had a previous negative test result and then became infected with HIV later.

"It's a sad story, but a familiar one," said Matthew Hodson of GMFA. "I think that lots of men when they test negative think that they will always have safer sex from then on, but then find that it's not always easy. Getting a negative test result can give you the opportunity to think about your behaviour, why you felt you needed to test in the first place and what you can do stay safer in future, but without support a negative test can actually increase the chances of sexual risk taking."

To help gay men who test negative to stay negative, GMFA have just produced a new booklet called 'Tested Negative?' This booklet provides both information and exercises that help men to take control of the sex that they have, and avoid the sex that is more risky than they want. The booklet is now available to gay men in some gay bars and is being distributed by health trainers on the scene and through GUM testing

services in London. It can also be downloaded free of charge from GMFA's website at www.gmfa.org.uk/staynegative.

Partly due to improvements in treatment for HIV, the uptake of HIV testing has increased dramatically in recent years. In 2003, just over 30,000 HIV tests were offered to gay men in the UK. By 2006, more than 41,000 HIV tests were being offered and the proportion of men getting tested had also increased. In London, 80% of tests offered are now being accepted by gay men^[1].

While the numbers of tests have increased, most clinics only have limited time and resources to provide those with a negative HIV test result with safer sex information. Studies over the years found that men who tested negative repeatedly were more likely to have unprotected sex^[2]. In a recent study, researchers for the Health Protection Agency found that negative HIV tests could contribute to a belief that some risky behaviours were actually safe enough and so lead to continued or increased risk behaviour. They also found that a negative HIV test "imbued men with a sense of immunity from HIV"^[3].

The 'Tested Negative' booklet includes information on HIV tests, HIV risk and what to do if it all goes wrong, as well as exercises that can help men to make the changes they need to keep themselves safe. The booklet is designed so that readers can pick and choose the information and exercises that they need.

"Even though the medical treatment of HIV has greatly improved the life expectancy for people who are infected, HIV is still a very serious and incurable medical condition," said Matthew Hodson. "Everything that we can do to support men to stay HIV negative is valuable, both for the individuals concerned and for the wider gay community. By reading this

^[1] HPA. Testing Times - HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections in the United Kingdom: 2007

^[2] Elford, Jonathan et al. Incidence of HIV infection among gay men in a London HIV testing clinic, 1997-1998 (Research Letters). *AIDS: Volume 15(5)30 March 2001pp 650-653*

Norton J, Elford J, Sherr L, Miller R, Johnson M. Repeat HIV testing at a London same-day testing clinic. *AIDS 1997, 11: 773 -781.*

^[3] INSIGHT study group. *Factors associated with HIV seroconversion in gay men in England at the start of the 21st century.* Sex. Transm. Inf. 2008;84;8-13

book and trying out some of the exercises you're making a commitment to keep your negative HIV status forever."

'Tested Negative' was written by GMFA staff and volunteers, working with clinic staff in sexual health services throughout London, including St Mary's, Bart's, Royal Free and Chelsea and Westminster.

- Ends -

If more information about this or any other of GMFA's campaigns and actions is required,

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Notes to editor:

Research references:

[1] HPA. Testing Times - HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections in the United Kingdom: 2007

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About GMFA:

GMFA was established in 1992 and is the UK's leading charity dedicated to gay men's health. GMFA's mission is to improve gay men's health by increasing the control they have over their own lives. We believe that the best health promotion for gay men comes from gay men themselves, and so we use the knowledge and ideas of our 170 volunteers (most of them gay men) to design and plan our thought provoking sexual health interventions. We have received international acclaim for our Sex and Sexual Health website (www.gmfa.org.uk/sex). Our other websites include a detailed listing of sexual health services available for gay men

in London (www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices), an information resource for HIV positive gay men (www.gmfa.org.uk/positive) and a guide to gay sports and social groups in London (www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide). All of our sites can be accessed at www.gmfa.org.uk. GMFA produce a range of advertising campaigns, leaflets, postcards and booklets. Independent surveys have concluded that our campaigns reach up to 60% of the London gay population and we are the most reliable agency at reaching gay men. In addition to this we distribute our own health magazine, FS, free to London's gay bars and clubs to further educate gay men about relationships, their bodies, general health and STIs. Over the last fourteen years we have provided courses for over 10,000 gay men, providing safer sex education, life skills and stop smoking courses. We currently provide a range of groupwork interventions across England and Wales. GMFA has Big Lottery funding to create sexual health interventions for Black gay men in London.

Matthew Hodson

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GMFA – the gay men's health charity

Improving gay men's health by increasing the control they have over their own lives

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GMFA: Find out more about GMFA, volunteer or donate at www.gmfa.org.uk/aboutgmfa

Sex & sexual health: Information and advice on HIV & STIs at www.gmfa.org.uk/sex

Services for gay men in London: Resources & sexual health services for London's gay men at www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices

Positive: Information for HIV positive gay men at www.gmfa.org.uk/positive

Sports and social groups: A guide to sporting and social activity groups for gay men in London at www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide

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