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## **Health officials praise new drug approved to slow spread of HIV, but remind community safe-sex practices still important**

While a newly approved drug could help slow the proliferation of HIV, Riverside County health officials are emphasizing that safe-sex practices will continue to be critical to prevent the illness from spreading.

The Food and Drug Administration has approved the new use of Truvada—to be taken once daily—to reduce the risk of sexually acquired HIV-1 infection in adults who do not have the illness but are at high risk of becoming infected.

“It is our hope in the department that, along with proper safer sex practices, approved medications like Truvada can reduce the risk and spread of HIV infection,” said Cameron Kaiser, Interim Riverside County health officer. “However, we still continue to endorse safer sex practices as the key means of containing spread of STDs in general, and even though these studies are encouraging, they are only one front for battling HIV.”

According to the FDA, Debra Birnkrant, director of the Division of Antiviral Products for the federal agency, said that Truvada works to prevent HIV from establishing itself and multiplying in the body. While this is a new approved use, she said, Truvada is not a new product. It was approved by the FDA in 2004 for use in combination with other medications to treat HIV-infected adults and children over 12 years old.

Kaiser said there is a concern that approval of the drug could lead some to ignore safe-sex practices in the mistaken belief the use of Truvada alone would be enough to prevent spread of the disease.

Birnkrant also stressed that Truvada is meant to be used as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention plan that includes consistent and correct condom use, risk reduction counseling, regular HIV testing, and treatment of any other sexually-transmitted infections.

In two large clinical trials, daily use of Truvada was shown to significantly reduce the risk of HIV infection.

In Riverside County, about 1,500 people are living with HIV, while about 1.2 million Americans are infected nationally. Between 2009 and 2011, there were 361 new HIV cases reported in Riverside County. Nationally, about 50,000 adults and adolescents in the U.S. are newly diagnosed with HIV each year.