

## Peer Health Educators Trained in HIV Testing

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newwave@tulane.edu

One in five Americans who are living with HIV don't know it, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and New Orleans was among the top three cities in the country with the highest new AIDS diagnoses in 2008. For some Tulane students, those statistics might hit a little too close to home.



Sam Roecker, left, a first-year Tulane student, practices explaining how to take the rapid HIV test with HIV counseling trainer, Scott Tims. (Photo by Robyn Correll)

Testing is a vital part of HIV prevention and management. That's why the [Center for Wellness and Health Promotion](#) at Tulane (also known as theWELL, offers free, anonymous rapid HIV testing for Tulane students on Mondays from noon to 2 p.m. and on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon at theWELL office, suite 115 in the Reily Student Recreation Center.

The center recently trained six peer health educators to be HIV counselors.

"It's important that the people who come in for testing have a tester they can relate to," said Nick Thomas, sexual health coordinator for theWELL.

Parts of the training have been challenging, said newly trained peer health educator Kathryn Kaintz, a sophomore majoring in public health, especially learning to counsel people when emotions run high. “But the more I learn about it, the more important I realize getting tested is,” she said.

The rapid HIV test, Thomas said, is nearly 99 percent effective at detecting HIV antibodies, but antibodies can take up to three months to be detected. “That's why it's important to get tested often if you're engaging in what might be considered 'risk behaviors,'" he said.

According to the CDC, having unprotected sex with multiple partners is the most risky behavior for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Condom usage, it states, is critical to prevent infection, which is why theWELL and the Student Health Center offer free condoms for students.

Tulane peer health educators also offer counseling in risk reduction and prevention.

“Encouraging the student body of Tulane to be informed and responsible in their sexual lives can only make this a healthier and safer campus,” said Scott Tims, director for theWELL.

*Robyn Correll, a student in the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, is a graduate assistant in the Tulane Center for Wellness and Health Promotion.*