



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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LEARN YOUR STATUS TO HELP PREVENT HIV/AIDS

World AIDS Day is December 1

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Department of Health is collaborating with community partners across the state to call attention to the importance of HIV prevention and treatment through planned activities for World AIDS Day on December 1, 2009. This year's theme is "**Universal Access and Human Rights**," promoting the message that to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS people must know their HIV status, feel empowered to access treatment and know their rights to take action against stigma and discrimination.

"HIV has not gone away. The first step in stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS is to ensure that everyone knows his or her HIV status," said Veronica Gunn, MD, chief medical officer for the Department of Health. "Everyone who is sexually active needs to learn about and practice effective methods to prevent receiving or transmitting HIV to others."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates there are now about 1.1 million people in the United States living with HIV, and that of that number, one in five is unaware of his or her status. People who are unaware that they are HIV-positive are responsible for transmitting 50 to 70 percent of new infections.

Tennessee has not escaped the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, with cases reported in every county of the state. Figures through the end of 2008 show 20,305 Tennessee residents have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Of this number, 14,901 Tennesseans are currently living with HIV/AIDS, and to date there have been 5,404 deaths among Tennesseans infected with this virus. Department of Health statistics show that African Americans are the most disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS in Tennessee; 64 percent of the 1,071 new reported HIV/AIDS cases in Tennessee in 2008 were among this population.

The Department of Health and many community partners throughout the state are committed to reducing the number of new HIV infections in Tennessee.

"Routine HIV testing for all sexually active people is critical. It's the first step in controlling the HIV pandemic," said Jeanece Seals, Department of Health HIV/AIDS/STD section director. "I encourage everyone to take a leadership role in his or her own health by getting tested and by encouraging their friends, neighbors and family to get tested. Know your status."

A person may feel perfectly healthy for several years after becoming infected with HIV, and may be at risk for passing the virus on to others. The only way to know for certain if an individual is infected with HIV is to be tested.

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425 FIFTH AVENUE NORTH
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WWW.TENNESSEE.GOV/HEALTH**

The Department of Health offers confidential HIV testing at all county health department clinics, which also provide counseling with a trained health care provider on ways to reduce the risk of HIV infection. To find your local county health department, visit the TDOH Web site at <http://health.state.tn.us/localdepartments.htm>.

Other sites that offer HIV tests can be found online at www.HIVtest.org. Mobile phone users can send a text message with their zip code to "KNOWIT" (566948); within seconds they will receive a text message identifying a testing site near them.

For more information about planned World AIDS Day activities across the state, call the HIV/AIDS Hotline toll-free at 1-800-525-2437, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Central time.

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