



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FEBRUARY 2, 2011

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KNOW YOUR STATUS – IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS *National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is February 7, 2011*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The HIV/AIDS pandemic disproportionately affects African-Americans in Tennessee. In an effort to draw attention to this crisis among black communities, the Tennessee Department of Health will observe National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on February 7, 2011. This event provides individuals in African-American communities a chance to learn about HIV/AIDS, the importance of early detection and how to protect themselves from HIV infection.

“National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is an excellent opportunity for African-Americans in Tennessee to get tested for HIV and learn more about how HIV is impacting communities across our state,” said Carolyn Wester, MD, MPH, medical director of the state’s HIV/AIDS/STD section. “Free testing events are offered in every major city. I encourage everyone to have an HIV test and learn how to protect yourself from acquiring or transmitting HIV.”

This year’s NBHAAD theme is “**It Takes a Village to Fight HIV/AIDS**,” encouraging all African-Americans to get educated, tested, involved and treated. A comprehensive list of events planned across Tennessee for National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day can be found at <http://www.blackaidsgiving.org/states/tn.html>.

Someone in the United States is infected with HIV every 9.5 minutes, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a particular burden on African-American communities. Department of Health data show 64 percent of all Tennesseans diagnosed with HIV in 2009 were African-American. As of the end of 2010, there were more than 9,000 African-Americans living with HIV throughout Tennessee. African-Americans represent 53 percent of all reported cases of HIV in Tennessee since 1982, the year in which AIDS reporting became mandatory in the state. Similarly, African-Americans represented 53 percent of all deaths reported among HIV-infected individuals in Tennessee in 2010.

Many individuals who are infected with HIV are unaware of their status and may unknowingly transmit the virus to others. 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 the HIV virus is to be tested.

Free and confidential HIV testing is offered in all Tennessee county health department clinics and at community-based organizations across the state. Tennessee’s health department clinics also offer counseling with trained health care providers on ways to reduce the risk of acquiring HIV. Find a list of county health department locations online at <http://health.state.tn.us/localdepartments.htm>.

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CORDELL HULL BUILDING, 3RD FLOOR
425 FIFTH AVENUE NORTH
NASHVILLE, TN 37243
WWW.TENNESSEE.GOV/HEALTH

Information on other sites that offer HIV testing can be found online at www.HIVtest.org. Mobile phone users can send a text message with their ZIP code to “KNOWIT” (566948), and within seconds will receive a text message identifying a nearby testing site.

HIV affects people of all backgrounds and cultures but disproportionately affects African-American men and women. Prevention is the best way to fight HIV, and individuals can prevent infection by knowing the facts about the virus and making good decisions. Here are a few quick facts about HIV/AIDS:

What is HIV or AIDS?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV damages a person's body by destroying blood cells that help the body fight diseases. People living with HIV may appear and feel healthy for several years. However, even if they feel healthy, HIV is still affecting their bodies and the virus may be transmitted to others. AIDS, or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, is the late stage of HIV infection, when a person's immune system is severely damaged and has difficulty fighting diseases and certain cancers.

How does one get HIV/AIDS?

A person can become infected with HIV by having unprotected sex with a person who has HIV/AIDS or sharing needles or syringes (“drug works”) with someone who has HIV/AIDS. A woman can pass HIV/AIDS to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth or through breast milk after delivery.

What are the signs of HIV?

People can't tell if an individual has HIV just by looking at him or her. Most people do not show any signs of illness when they first get HIV. An HIV test is the only way to know for sure if a person has HIV.

How can one get tested for HIV?

HIV testing is available at local health department locations. It involves providing a small blood sample, and some locations can test using a mouth swab. Tests are free and confidential, which means results are not shared with anyone. Interpreters are available at local health departments for those who do not speak English.

How can one prevent HIV infection?

Abstinence, or not having sex, is the only absolute way to prevent HIV infection. Individuals can protect themselves by using latex condoms each time they participate in sexual activity. Condoms are available at no cost at any HIV testing site.

What can one do if he or she tests positive for HIV?

Individuals who test positive can receive guidance and assistance from health care counselors at all testing locations. There is no cure for HIV, but there are medicines a doctor can prescribe that can slow down the virus and help a person stay healthy. A pregnant woman can take medicines from a doctor to lower the chances of passing the virus to her baby.

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is a nationwide HIV testing and treatment initiative focusing on four specific goals: education, testing, involvement and treatment. For more information on NBHAAD, visit www.blackaidsday.org. Questions about HIV/AIDS can be answered by calling the toll-free National HIV/AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS.

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This news release can be accessed online at <http://news.tennesseeanytime.org/taxonomy/term/30>.