



February 7, 2012

Dear Colleagues,

Today is National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD). The theme for this observance day, “*I Am My Brother/Sister’s Keeper: Fight HIV/AIDS!*” holds much significance as we reflect on opportunities to bring an end to the spread of HIV in the United States.

African Americans (AAs) make up just 14 percent of the population, but accounted for 44 percent of all new infections in 2009. Since the start of the epidemic, nearly a quarter of a million AAs with AIDS have died. In 2009:

- Black women accounted for 30 percent of the estimated new HIV infections among all blacks. The estimated rate of new HIV infections for black women was more than 15 times as high as the rate for white women, and more than three times as high as that of Latina women.
- Black men accounted for 70 percent of the estimated new infections among all blacks. The estimated rate of new HIV infection for black men was more than six and a half times as high as that of white men, and more than two and a half times as high as that of Latino men or black women.
- Black men who have sex with men (MSM) represented an estimated 73 percent of new infections among all black men, and 37 percent among all MSM.

Addressing Social and Economic Factors

We must tackle the root causes that contribute to the spread of HIV in black communities. We know that poor access to health care can hinder getting an HIV test or treatment, a critical step to stopping this disease. Also, a higher HIV risk is associated with factors such as living in areas with high rates of HIV, lower income, educational level, employment status, homelessness, and incarceration. In addition, stigma and homophobia, which are far too prevalent in all communities, continue to prevent many African Americans from seeking testing, treatment or support. It is important that we talk openly about HIV in our communities, with our partners, peers and families.

HIV Prevention Efforts

Working together with state, local, and tribal public health agencies, community-based organizations, and other partners, CDC continues to prioritize its efforts to address the barriers that contribute to HIV in the black community. CDC supports *Act Against AIDS* (AAA), a national communication initiative, which aims to reduce the risk of HIV infection among the most impacted populations, including blacks, gay and bisexual men of all races and ethnicities, and Latinos. Two AAA campaigns are specifically designed and targeted for African Americans: *Take Charge. Take the Test* encourages black women to get tested for HIV; and *Testing Makes Us Stronger* aims to increase HIV testing among black MSM. Furthermore, the *Act Against AIDS Leadership Initiative* (AAALI) is a partnership among CDC and many of the country’s leading organizations representing populations disproportionately affected by the epidemic to help mobilize communities nationwide.

Additionally, CDC’s Expanded Testing Program (ETP) aims to increase access to HIV testing in communities hardest hit by the disease. In the first three years of the project, more than 2.8 million tests were conducted identifying more than 18,000 people with HIV—Blacks were among the most reached through testing (57.4%)

and diagnosis with HIV (66%). Finally, CDC recently awarded \$339 million to state and local health departments, which includes ETP implementation, to fund HIV prevention activities, prioritizing such activities as HIV testing, condom distribution, prevention efforts among individual infected with HIV, and policy initiatives. If we are to overcome the HIV epidemic in the United States, we must stem the spread of HIV in the black community—everyone and every action counts.

Critical HIV Prevention Messages

Lastly, it is most important that we promote an open dialogue about HIV, urging individuals to talk with their partners, peers and families about the disease and how it can be prevented. Focusing on core prevention messages—not having sex, mutual monogamy, routine condom use, HIV testing, and treatment—also are key to preventing or reducing the spread of HIV. Additionally, increasing knowledge about the importance of HIV testing is the first step individuals can take to protect their health. CDC encourages persons with increased risk for HIV to get tested annually. For those who are diagnosed with HIV, seeking and remaining on treatment can help them live longer, healthier lives and can help to reduce the spread of HIV to others.

CDC has released new videos for your use. The first two are NBHAAD specific and include core HIV prevention messages. Please watch these videos, link to them, add them to your Web site, share them on Facebook and tweet about them.

- [Protecting Yourself and Your Partners](#)
- [Get the Facts, Talk about HIV](#)
- [HIV: Social and Environmental Factors](#) (includes information on social determinants of health found in the black communities)
- [HIV Prevention](#) (includes general HIV testing and treatment messages)

For more information and to find national and local NBHAAD events, go to www.nationalblackaidsday.org. To learn more about how you can get involved in the fight against HIV, please join www.actagainstaids.org.

Thank you for your support and we look forward to your continued collaboration.
Sincerely,

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