

*Let's stop HIV together.*TM

ACT
against
AIDS

Taking Aim at the Stigma and Complacency Fueling HIV in the United States

As part of its ongoing effort to put HIV back on the radar of all Americans, CDC has launched *Let's Stop HIV Together*, a new national communication campaign designed to address two major obstacles to stopping HIV in the United States:

- **Stigma** – Ongoing stigma about HIV or about those at risk of infection continues to prevent too many from seeking testing or treatment.
- **Complacency** – Too many Americans do not recognize the magnitude of the HIV crisis and the nation's sense of urgency has waned since the early days of the epidemic.

The campaign gives voice to people living with HIV from all walks of life, alongside their friends and family members. As part of the campaign, these individuals share their personal stories and call on everyone to join the fight against the disease.

Let's Stop HIV Together highlights the fact that HIV touches every corner of American society and that people with the infection are part of the fabric of our families and valued members of our communities.

Let's Stop HIV Together encourages everyone to:

- **Get the facts** – Learn the basics of HIV transmission and prevention.
- **Get tested** – CDC recommends that every adult and adolescent get tested at least once in his or her lifetime, and those at increased risk (for example, men who have sex with men, and individuals with new or multiple sexual partners) get tested at least once a year.
- **Get involved** – Encourage friends and loved ones to get tested and speak out against the stigma and complacency that help fuel the spread of HIV.

More than three decades after the first reported AIDS cases, HIV is still a crisis in the United States. Approximately 50,000 Americans become newly infected each year, and an estimated 1.1 million people are now living with HIV. Yet, nearly one in five of these individuals does not know that they are infected.



Dena (right) has lived with HIV since 1991.



HIV Stigma: A Deadly Opponent in the Fight Against AIDS

Combatting stigma is critical to stemming the spread of HIV in the United States. Research shows that while most Americans understand how HIV is transmitted, stigma and discrimination against those with HIV still persists.¹

Stigma keeps people from taking the action needed to protect themselves and others from this disease. For those at risk of infection, stigma can make it more difficult to use condoms and seek HIV testing. For those already diagnosed with HIV, stigma can discourage them from seeking and staying in the care they need to stay healthy and avoid transmitting the disease to others.



HIV in America: Far from Over, but Too Often Invisible

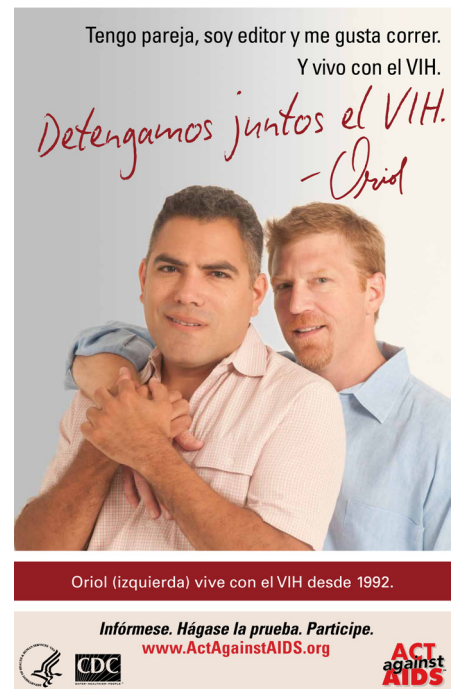
Despite the ongoing heavy toll of HIV, the epidemic is less visible today than in the past. A 2011 survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that the proportion of Americans who reported seeing or reading “some” or “a lot” about HIV in the U.S. had fallen from 70 percent in 2004 to just 40 percent in 2011.² At the same time, the sense of urgency around the epidemic declined sharply, with the percentage of Americans naming HIV as the nation’s most urgent health problem falling from 21 percent in 2004 to 7 percent in 2011.³

Declining awareness and concern about HIV among the American public may lead some to underestimate the continued need for action to fight the epidemic. In addition, those at highest risk of infection may be less likely to recognize their risk, or may believe that HIV is no longer a serious health threat. Young people who have grown up without seeing the epidemic’s devastating effects may be particularly vulnerable. For example, a study among young black gay and bisexual men in 21 major cities found that among those who thought they were at low risk of infection, one in five was, in fact, already infected with HIV.⁴

Let’s Stop HIV Together: The Campaign Elements

The campaign is designed to reach a general audience, as well as people living with HIV and their friends and family, through multiple channels. Campaign components include:

- **National advertising** — National online and print advertising, as well as TV and radio public service announcements designed to reach a broad range of people in their daily lives.
- **Local advertising** — Billboard and transit advertising in cities hard-hit by HIV. Ads are currently running in Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles, Dallas, New Orleans, the New York metropolitan area and Washington, DC; additional cities will be added later.
- **Social Media** — Through Facebook (www.facebook.com/ActAgainstAIDS), Twitter (@TalkHIV), and YouTube (www.youtube.com/CDCstreaminghealth), the campaign helps dispel HIV myths and misperceptions while encouraging people to share their personal stories and join the fight against HIV.
- **Campaign website** — The *Let’s Stop HIV Together* web site (www.ActAgainstAIDS.org) provides information about HIV transmission, testing, and prevention, and online resources for others to use to expand the reach of the campaign such as ads, web banners, badges and buttons.
- **Promotional materials** — Posters, postcards and brochures are available for distribution in cities throughout the nation by local public health agencies, businesses and community-based organizations.



Let’s Stop HIV Together is part of *Act Against AIDS*, CDC’s 5-year, national communication campaign to combat complacency about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States. Additional *Act Against AIDS* campaigns focus on populations at increased risk for HIV such as African American women and gay and bisexual men, and on helping health care providers talk with their patients about HIV testing, prevention, medical care, and how to avoid transmitting HIV to others.

References

- 1 Kaiser Family Foundation. *HIV/AIDS at 30: A Public Opinion Perspective*. Published June 2011.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 MacKellar et al. Perceptions of Lifetime Risk and Actual Risk for Acquiring HIV Among Young Men Who Have Sex with Men. *AIDS and Behavior*. March 2007.