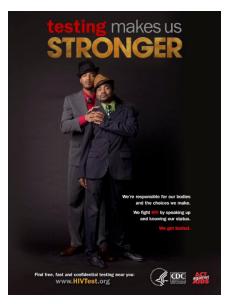# Encouraging Black Gay and Bisexual Men to Take a Stand Against HIV

To address the urgent need to reduce HIV infections among black gay and bisexual men, CDC has launched *Testing Makes Us Stronger*™ (www.hivtest.org/stronger), a new public awareness and education campaign that encourages HIV testing among black men who have sex with men (MSM) aged 18 to 44 —one of the groups most heavily affected by HIV.

*Testing Makes Us Stronger* communicates positive, empowering messages that emphasize HIV testing as a source of strength. Examples of messages featured in campaign advertisements include:

- "Our HIV status is powerful information. It helps us take better care of each other. Get tested."

- "Gay and bisexual men are standing up against HIV. We're staying strong and informed. We get tested."

- "We're responsible for our bodies and the choices we make. We fight HIV by speaking up and knowing our status. We get tested."

The campaign is designed to reach black gay and bisexual men in their everyday lives, through national online and magazine ads, and transit and billboard ads in six cities where black MSM are heavily affected by HIV (Atlanta, Baltimore, Houston, New York, Oakland, and Washington, DC). The campaign also includes social media outreach through Facebook, Twitter, and blogs that reach black gay men.

*Testing Makes Us Stronger* was designed by black gay men for black gay men. A panel of black gay and bisexual men, including community leaders, physicians, and other experts, worked closely with CDC to develop the campaign messages and strategy. And approximately 400 black gay and bisexual men gave input through focus groups and surveys.

*Testing Makes Us Stronger* is part of *Act Against AIDS* (www.actagainstaids.org), CDC's five-year, multi-faceted national communication campaign to refocus national attention on the importance of HIV prevention and testing. It builds on *Know Where You Stand*™, an earlier campaign delivering HIV testing messages to black gay and bisexual men across the United States.

## Black Gay and Bisexual Men Are Hit Hard by HIV

Black gay and bisexual men are among those hardest hit by HIV, accounting for almost a quarter (22%) of all new infections in the United States. Young, black MSM are the only group in the U.S. among whom new infections are increasing — between 2006 and 2009, new HIV infections increased by almost half (48 percent) among those aged 13 to 29.

Research shows that black gay and bisexual men do not engage in riskier behaviors than other gay men, but are at elevated risk for HIV due to a range of social and environmental factors. For example, the high prevalence of HIV that already exists in many black and gay communities increases the likelihood of becoming infected with each sexual encounter. Factors such as undiagnosed HIV infection, limited access to health care, homophobia, stigma, and economic hardship also contribute to increased HIV risk.

# HIV Testing Can Help Break the Cycle of Infection

- Despite these troubling statistics, black gay and bisexual men can help turn the tide of HIV in their community by knowing their status. CDC data tell us that black gay and bisexual men living with HIV are least likely to know they are infected. In a study of 21 major U.S. cities in 2008 nearly 60 percent of black MSM with HIV did not know they were infected — more than any other racial or ethnic group.

- Increasing HIV testing is critical to reducing new infections, since people who know they have HIV can take steps to decrease the risk that they will transmit the virus to others. Testing is also the gateway to treatment, and research shows that people on antiretroviral treatment are less likely to transmit HIV to others. In addition, those who test negative can take action to protect themselves from infection.

CDC recommends that sexually active gay and bisexual men get tested for HIV at least once a year, and recent CDC data suggest that sexually active MSM might benefit from more frequent HIV testing (e.g., every three to six months).

# *Testing Makes Us Stronger* Components

The campaign is designed to reach black gay and bisexual men through multiple channels, using images that reflect the diversity and strength of the black MSM community. Campaign components include:

- **National Advertising —** Online and magazine ads in outlets that reach black gay and bisexual men, including mainstream African American outlets such as *Vibe*, gay websites such as EDGE, and outlets that focus on black MSM.



- **Local advertising —** Billboard, transit, and print advertising in six U.S. cities where black gay and bisexual men are heavily affected by HIV (Atlanta, Baltimore, Houston, New York, Oakland, and Washington, DC).

- **Campaign web site —** The *Testing Makes Us Stronger* web site (www.hivtest.org/stronger) provides visitors with basic information about HIV/AIDS, an overview of the campaign and local events, campaign graphics and resources, and a tool to search for HIV testing sites by zip code.

- **Facebook —** The *Testing Makes Us Stronger* Facebook page (www.facebook.com/testingmakesusstronger) encourages users to interact and empower each other to take charge of their health. It will be regularly updated with campaign videos, event listings, and posts to encourage discussion of HIV testing and black gay men's health.

- **Twitter —** The campaign will share campaign updates through @AIDSgov, @HIVTalk, and partner Twitter accounts, and encourage campaign-focused tweets around HIV/AIDS observance days and campaign events.

- **Promotional materials —** *Testing Makes Us Stronger* posters, postcards and palm cards will be available for download on the campaign website for community-based organizations and health departments around the country to use locally.

- **Black Pride events —** The campaign will participate in Black Pride events in 15 cities across the country, including the six cities targeted for local advertising. Black Pride activities will include on-site outreach to attendees, promotional material distribution, and advertising in event programs and on event websites.