

Act Against AIDS

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Rich Wolitski, PhD] Hello, my name is Rich Wolitski, and I'm the Acting Director of the Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention in the National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention at CDC.

Today, I'd like to talk with you about a serious issue and what CDC is doing, along with partners, to combat it. The issue is HIV and AIDS, but more specifically, the issue is the impact that the epidemic continues to have in the United States.

Recent CDC estimates indicate that every nine and a half minutes, someone in this country is infected with HIV. Think about it — a new HIV infection every nine and a half minutes. That means that three people become infected with HIV during the time it takes to watch just 30 minutes of the evening news or your favorite sitcom. Over 150 people become infected with HIV during the course of a single day. And 56,300 people become infected each year.

No matter who you are, chances are that HIV and AIDS have already touched your life in some way. The epidemic has taken a substantial toll on the health of the nation, as over one million people are living with HIV in the United States. And I'm one of them.

Despite these sobering facts, there is a disconnect in this country. Far too many people still don't recognize the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States or its substantial cost to our country in terms of medical expenses, lost worker productivity, and human lives.

The rates of HIV infection in the hardest-hit populations in the United States are staggering. A recent analysis found that, if black America was its own country, it would rank sixteenth in the world in the number of people with HIV. Sixteenth in the world means that, among African Americans and other blacks in the United States, in our own country, there are more HIV infections than in Ethiopia, Botswana, or Haiti. The saddest aspect of all of this is that HIV infection and progression to AIDS can be prevented. We know how to stop the spread of this disease.

So how did this happen? There are many answers to that question. However, we know that part of the problem is that we have allowed complacency about this epidemic to seep into our national consciousness. Complacency that stems from the incorrect perception that HIV and AIDS are mainly a problem for the rest of the world and not here at home, or the perception that HIV isn't as dangerous as it once was, that all someone has to do is take medications and he or she will be fine. And because we're not seeing stories every night on television about people dying with AIDS or people protesting in the streets for prevention and medical services, then some think the epidemic isn't as serious as it once was. But the epidemic is still here and frankly, complacency is deadly.

More people than ever need the facts to remember HIV is a serious problem and to protect themselves. So CDC is launching a series of new public communication efforts. Some are aimed

at the general public and some are for people in this country who are at most risk of becoming infected.

CDC is also launching very important partnerships that have the potential to provide significant reach and increase the scope of our efforts. The framework for all of these activities is a campaign called Act Against AIDS.

Act Against AIDS is the overarching umbrella for the myriad activities that CDC will be launching in the months to come. The goal is to remind Americans that HIV is still deadly, difficult, and costly. Prevention messages need to reach not only people at risk for HIV, but all of those who should be part of the solution, which means all of us.

Why all of us? Well, when your country is facing an epidemic that infects over 50,000 people a year, can we really afford to marginalize the HIV/AIDS epidemic as something that happens to others? And because it is an infectious disease, *everyone* can do something to help stop it from spreading. Everyone can get the facts about how to prevent HIV infection and spread the word that knowing your HIV status helps to protect your health and the health of those you love. An important fact to know and to pass on is that the risk of infection is real. Every nine and a half minutes, someone is infected with HIV in the United States.

[PSA — Multiple Talent] Right here, in the United States... every nine and a half minutes... someone's father... someone's mother... someone's brother... someone's sister... someone's friend... someone's coworker... someone's neighbor... is infected with HIV. Get the facts. Get the facts. Visit nineandahalfminutes.org. Act Against AIDS.

[Rich Wolitski, PhD] The goal of the Every Nine and a Half Minutes phase of Act Against AIDS is to raise public awareness of the severity of the HIV epidemic in this country, because even though some people are more at risk for HIV infection than others, the reality is that anyone who injects drugs or who has sex outside a mutually monogamous relationship in which both partners are HIV-negative could be at risk for HIV.

As I mentioned before, along with the general public outreach, CDC is announcing a component of the campaign for African Americans at high risk. This component is the Act Against AIDS Leadership Initiative, which will strive to extend the reach of messages and prevention services to African American communities in the United States. This innovative program enhances existing leadership within the communities most affected by HIV — in this case, African American communities — to address head-on the realities of HIV and AIDS in the communities that they serve and represent.

CDC has partnered with 14 national African American groups, enabling them to support staff dedicated to coordinating participation in the Act Against AIDS campaign and in creating their own HIV prevention activities in African American communities across the country.

The program is an example of CDC's philosophy of prevention that includes empowering those who already work in communities to do the work that they are good at and work that will be effective in helping to stop the further spread of HIV. CDC chose African American

communities as the focus for its first initiative for many reasons. First and foremost, the HIV epidemic is threatening more African Americans, whether they are straight, gay, or bisexual.

In 2008, CDC released new estimates, showing that 1 in 16 black men and 1 in 30 black women will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetimes — a far greater risk than that for any other racial or ethnic group. Blacks make up only about 12 percent of the U.S. population, but account for almost half of all new HIV infections. HIV is truly a pressing health crisis in the African American community.

In the future, CDC will be creating additional campaign phases and initiatives for other communities at risk, such as gay and bisexual men of all races and ethnicities, who have the highest rates of HIV infections of any group, and Hispanics and Latinos, who are also disproportionately affected by HIV.

As an example of future work, CDC will soon begin testing a new online phase of Act Against AIDS, aimed at African American men who have sex with men. This project includes partnering with black Gay Pride events throughout the country this summer to get HIV prevention messages directly to those who need them.

In addition to the Act Against AIDS Leadership Initiative, the other partnership that I alluded to previously is one with the Kaiser Family Foundation. The goal of this partnership is to establish and sustain a coalition of entertainment, print, online, television programming, and communication organizations that can help to get the word out about HIV and AIDS in the United States.

CDC is very excited about the Act Against AIDS campaign and all of its associated initiatives. The multi-pronged structure of the campaign will enable us to reach multiple and diverse at-risk populations while also working on the national level to raise overall awareness of the HIV epidemic.

It is our hope that you, too, will work within your communities and within your networks to help your community Act Against AIDS. If you already partner with CDC, we hope these new initiatives will provide you with some new tools for your work. If you are an individual concerned about HIV in this country, help spread the word that the HIV epidemic in the United States is not over — this is very important — and get tested for HIV and encourage those you care about to get tested, too. Because every nine and a half minutes, right here, in the United States, someone's brother, sister, father, mother, friend, coworker, or neighbor becomes infected with HIV. We know how to prevent these infections from occurring, we just all need to do more to ensure that they don't keep occurring.

On behalf of CDC, thank you for watching this podcast and, more importantly, thank you for taking action against HIV and AIDS.

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[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.