

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

On this National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, we have greater opportunity than ever before to reverse the HIV epidemic in black America and the nation as a whole.

Today, we have a National HIV/AIDS Strategy that directs the nation to focus its prevention efforts on communities at greatest risk, including African Americans, the racial group most severely impacted by HIV. We have an African American community that is mobilized like never before, with many of the nation's longstanding black national organizations making HIV prevention a key priority.

Over the past several years, we have also witnessed tremendous breakthroughs in HIV prevention that can help alter the course of the epidemic. Rates of HIV testing are growing and are at an all-time high. Yet research now shows that early treatment not only provides improved health and much longer lives for people living with HIV, but it also can reduce their risk of passing the virus to partners by 96 percent. And new prevention tools, like a daily pill, have been shown to significantly reduce the risk of HIV infection in some high-risk populations, when combined with other prevention measures.

Now despite these important advances, the fight against this disease is far from over. The harsh reality is that today, even in the face of great hope and promise, African American communities continue to be devastated by HIV. Although only 14 percent of the US population, African Americans account for almost half of those living and dying with HIV/AIDS in this country.

And HIV touches every corner of the black community, and the impact of HIV has been especially devastating among black youth. Approximately 40 percent of new infections among blacks are now occurring among those aged 13 and 29 years. Young black gay and bisexual men are most severely affected, experiencing a nearly 50 percent increase in new HIV infections over the past few years. In addition, HIV is now the third leading cause of death among black women in the prime of their lives, those aged 35 to 44 years.

Now, to turn the tide on this epidemic, we must confront the complex social and environmental conditions that help fuel the HIV epidemic in African American communities. Lack of access to health care plays an important role. We know that those who don't have the means to see a doctor may not get an HIV test or HIV treatment until it's far too late. We also know that nearly one in five African Americans are without health insurance.

Where you live and where you choose your sexual partners also has a significant impact on your HIV risk. Higher rates of HIV that exist in black communities and the fact that African Americans tend to select partners who are of the same race increases the likelihood of being exposed to HIV infection with each sexual encounter.

Homophobia and stigma, far too prevalent in many communities, prevents too many in the black community from getting tested, and if HIV positive, from getting treated.

HIV prevention in black communities remains one of our top public health priorities. Last year, for example, CDC invested more than half of its HIV prevention budget to fight HIV among African Americans. We've expanded initiatives to reach more African Americans with HIV testing and increased the number and reach of HIV prevention programs in black communities.

We are working with our partners, like those in the Act Against AIDS Leadership Initiative, to launch campaigns and undertake activities aimed at increasing HIV testing and awareness among black women and black gay and bisexual men, among other groups.

Yet together, we have much more work to do. Today, I call on the faith community, the public health and community leaders, teachers, parents, and business leaders, both within and outside black communities, to maximize the powerful tools we now have at our fingertips and to work together to bring this epidemic to an end.

I also urge each of you to do your part. Get tested for HIV. If you are sexually active, use condoms consistently and correctly to protect yourself and your partners. If you are a person living with HIV, get and stay in treatment and take the necessary steps to prevent HIV transmission to your partners. You can learn more at www.actagainstaids.org.

We can end this crisis, and we must remember that HIV is completely preventable. By working together, we can put an end to this epidemic in our lifetimes.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.