



Health Awareness

No Time To Lose In Black America's AIDS Battle

by Hazel Dean, Sc.D., M.P.H.

(NAPSA)—As one of the three leading causes of death for black men 25 to 54 and black women 25 to 44, AIDS is truly a public health crisis. Yet, National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, which took place February 7, reminds us that we have the power to strike back.

First, let's review the facts. In 2002, blacks accounted for 54 percent of new HIV diagnoses and 50 percent of new AIDS diagnoses but only 12 percent of the U.S. population. Nearly three out of every four women diagnosed with HIV were African American in the 29 states where HIV diagnosis trends have been monitored over time. AIDS rates among African Americans were 10 times higher than rates among whites, and the AIDS rate for black women was 20 times higher than the rate for white women.

At the same time, nearly one in four African Americans lives in poverty and STD rates are as much as 24 times higher among whites. These factors further fuel and complicate our struggle against HIV.

Each of us can play a part in changing this grim picture. Here are some suggestions:

Test for HIV early and regularly. Testing for HIV is critical because it empowers individuals to protect their partners and their own health if infected. Unfortunately, one in four Americans with HIV doesn't know that he or she



HIV/AIDS is a growing health concern in the African-American community, says Dr. Hazel Dean.

is infected. And African Americans with HIV are more likely than whites to test late in their illness, when life-saving HIV treatments may not be as effective. New drugs are helping many HIV-infected people live for many years after diagnosis and perhaps a normal lifespan—if they find out their status early enough.

Deciding to get tested can be emotionally challenging, but a new type of test can make it easier. The rapid HIV test can provide preliminary results in 20 minutes, eliminating the long, anxiety-filled processing time associated with older tests. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is partnering with local communities to make rapid testing available in places where people live, work and congregate. To find a local testing provider, go to www.hivtest.org or

call CDC's National AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS.

If you test negative, take steps to stay HIV-free. Available data suggest that most of the African Americans infected with HIV in 2002 were infected through sexual contact. Talk to your partner about HIV and other STDs before sexual intimacy. If your partner has not been tested for HIV recently, insist on condom use.

If you're HIV-positive, don't give up—there are many community networks that provide the support, care, and services you need to stay healthier longer. You can also get treatment information by calling the AIDS Treatment Information line at 1-800-448-0440.

Become a community advocate. A faster test is just one part of the solution. To overcome barriers to HIV testing among African Americans, work towards ending the stigma associated with AIDS. That means more than having compassion for people with the disease. It means speaking out on their behalf and talking about HIV with your family, friends and colleagues.

As Associate Director for Health Disparities at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control's National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention, I am committed to addressing inequities in public health. With HIV and AIDS, there's not a moment to lose.

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