



Health Awareness

AIDS Is Every Latino's Battle

by Sam Martinez, M.D.

(NAPSA)—While surveys show that Latinos regard AIDS as the nation's number one health concern, actual statistics about the disease tell us that we may not be worried enough.

HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, disproportionately impacts Latinos. Even though we make up 14 percent of the U.S. population, Latinos accounted for nearly 19 percent of new HIV diagnoses in areas with HIV reporting in 2001. More than 20 years after the epidemic began, AIDS is one of the leading causes of death among Latinos ages 25 to 54.

The first-ever National Latino AIDS Awareness Day, held this year on October 15, demands that we look at the reasons behind these tragic numbers and work to change them.

One reason AIDS is ravaging Latino communities is our limited access to quality medical care. During the mid-1990's, advances in the treatment of HIV resulted in a dramatic decline in AIDS deaths overall, but barriers to receiving health care and information meant that improved survival among Latinos lagged far behind that of non-Hispanic whites.

Even today, Latinos are more likely to be tested for HIV later in their illness than both non-Hispanic whites and African Americans. Too many Latinos are diagnosed with full-blown AIDS at the time of their first test or within one year of taking it. Worse still, after receiving an HIV diagnosis, we are more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to put off seeking medical care.



GET TESTED—One of the most important steps you can take to combat AIDS is to get tested.

Another HIV prevention challenge for Latinos may be our diversity—we are not a single community, but many, with different cultures and customs. AIDS cases and HIV infection patterns vary among Latinos by place of birth. For example, those born in the U.S. accounted for 43 percent of AIDS cases in 2001, followed by Latinos born in Puerto Rico (22 percent) and Mexico (14 percent).

How do we bridge the cultural gaps that contribute to the devastation of AIDS among Latinos? By taking action, together and as individuals, to keep our loved ones, our communities and ourselves healthy.

One of the most important steps we can take today is to get tested. Finding out early if we have HIV empowers us to make decisions about our health. Knowing if we have HIV can help us get effective treatment sooner—and

adopt safer behaviors to avoid passing the virus on to someone else. And, for individuals who are not infected, testing provides links to the counseling and prevention services needed to stay uninfected.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is currently working to help people find out if they are infected and, if so, to link them to the local support network designed to provide the medical care and prevention services they need. Partnering with healthcare providers and community organizations—clinics, community centers, even churches—CDC is helping to make HIV testing easier and more readily available. Preliminary HIV test results are now available in as little as 20 minutes with a new rapid test, which helps to eliminate the long period of anxiety people experienced with previous HIV testing methods.

CDC is working with local groups and healthcare providers across the country to provide services to help Latinos—those infected with HIV, those not infected and those who are unsure of their status—to better understand ways of fighting HIV in their communities.

For information about HIV testing or to learn more about HIV/AIDS, contact CDC's National AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS (English) or 1-800-344-SIDA (Spanish), or on the Internet at www.hivtest.org. For treatment information, call the National Institutes of Health's AIDS Treatment Information Line at 1-800-448-0440.

Dr. Martinez is a Health Scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.