



# Health Awareness

## In The African American Community, Stopping AIDS Starts With Us

by Janet C. Cleveland

(NAPSA)—You don't need to be HIV-positive or know someone with AIDS to recognize the devastating impact HIV is having on African Americans across the United States. More African Americans are living with and dying from AIDS than any other population in the country. National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness & Information Day was officially held February 7, but we must all take action every day of the year—to get educated about HIV, get tested for the virus and get involved in our community's fight to prevent new infections.

African Americans are bearing the burden of HIV infection and AIDS more than any other racial or ethnic group. Blacks accounted for more than half of all new HIV diagnoses in 32 states from 2000 to 2003, while making up just 13 percent of the population in those states. In 2003, black men had the highest HIV/AIDS rate of any group—nearly seven times the rate of white men. Among black women during that same year, the rate was 18 times higher than among white women.

Although a person's sexual and drug-using behaviors can put him or her at risk for HIV, other factors increase African Americans' vulnerability. Poverty and inadequate access to healthcare play a significant role. So do high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), which can facilitate HIV transmission.

Silence about HIV can also contribute to the disproportionate impact of this disease. Surveys have shown that more than four in ten African Americans have never discussed HIV with their sexual partners. Not talking about HIV can discourage people from recognizing risk or getting tested.



**"Get tested for HIV, get educated, and get involved," says Janet Cleveland.**

Today, though, more African Americans are realizing that we have the power to turn the tide of the epidemic. Surveys show that we are more likely than any other group to call HIV/AIDS the nation's number one health problem. And on February 7, hundreds of events in cities around the U.S. provided opportunities for us to make a difference. You, too, can exercise your power to stop HIV by taking some simple steps today.

First, learn more about HIV. Too many African Americans don't know what places a person at risk for HIV infection. Take time to learn the basics. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-2437 is a good place to get accurate information.

Next, get tested! If you think that you, or your sexual partner, are at risk of infection, get an HIV test. Whether you are infected or not, prevention services are available that can help you reduce your risk and stay healthy. To find out where you can get tested—often free of

charge—visit [www.hivtest.org](http://www.hivtest.org) or call the hotline listed above.

Third, get involved and start talking. Even if National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness & Information Day passed you by, you can volunteer in community or church groups to help stop the spread of HIV and support those who are living with HIV/AIDS. You can help erase the stigma of HIV by talking about it openly with your family and friends.

African Americans are certainly not alone in the fight against HIV. In my work at CDC, I help direct the U.S. government's efforts to support prevention programs in communities across the country. On the South Side of Chicago, for example, CDC is working with Roseland Christian Health Ministries to help African Americans get counseled and tested for HIV and to help those with HIV take steps to protect others from infection. In Baltimore, we're helping to support the Sisters Informing Sisters about Topics on AIDS (SISTA) project, allowing African-American women at high risk for HIV to gain support from their peers to help reduce risky behaviors.

During the years that I have worked in HIV prevention, I've seen enough of the devastation from AIDS to know that African Americans have no time to lose. We must all act to end the grip of the epidemic on our people. If each of us does our part to get educated, get tested and get involved, we can win the fight against AIDS. It's a victory that can't come soon enough.

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