

Health NEWS YOU CAN USE

Three Things You Can Do To Stop AIDS

by Julie Gerberding, MD, MPH

(NAPSA)—Americans should remember that although the impact of AIDS in our country may have faded from front-page headlines, we are still on the front lines of the fight to stop its spread and save lives.

Fortunately, you don't need special training to join the battle against HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, here in the United States. You only need to do three simple things: learn more about HIV and how to protect yourself, get tested if you are at risk, and become involved in your community's fight against this deadly but preventable condition.

Each of us has 40,000 reasons to take these three actions—that is the estimated number of our fellow Americans who have become infected with HIV this year. And although HIV has been with us for 20 years, the number of cases hasn't decreased for the past decade.

In fact, the domestic HIV epidemic may be getting worse. The number of new HIV diagnoses appears to be rising among some groups—Latinos, non-Hispanic whites, gay and bisexual men, and men in general. African Americans continue to be disproportionately affected, accounting for more than half of all new cases.

This is painful both on a personal level and as the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). I was a doctor at San Francisco General Hospital during the early days of the AIDS epidemic, and lost too many patients, colleagues and friends to



be complacent about tragedy like that—especially tragedy that is completely preventable.

Today, 850,000 to 950,000 Americans are living with HIV. Sadly, one in four of them are not aware they're infected, because they haven't been tested. As a result, they are not benefiting from life saving treatment.

To overcome this tragedy, there are three easy ways we can all fight back:

- First, learn more about HIV and AIDS and how to protect yourself. Call CDC's National AIDS Hotline toll-free at (800) 342-AIDS or www.cdcnpi.com on the Internet. The more you know, the safer and healthier you can be.

- Second, if you are at risk, get tested for HIV now. If you remain at risk, test often. This is one of our main weapons against the disease because it empowers people who test HIV-positive to stop the virus' spread and save their own lives.

Thankfully, testing has never been easier. A new rapid HIV test, approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration last year,

provides preliminary results in as little as 20 minutes, eliminating the weeks of worry-filled waiting that people had to endure with older HIV tests.

Just as important, this test is helping to reach people who don't have access to the traditional health care system, because it can easily be used in non-medical settings, such as churches, community centers and nightclubs.

Fear of the result has often kept people from getting tested. But if you do test positive for HIV, a strong network of support can help you get the treatment, care and services you need. And the latest treatments can help you stay healthy and live longer, with fewer side effects than in the past.

So take charge of your health: make an appointment to get tested by your doctor, or visit a clinic or other testing location near you. A visit to www.hivtest.org can help you find a testing site in your area.

- Third, get involved! Donate time to a local organization that helps people get tested and learn about HIV. And talk about HIV in your community to help end the fear and stigma that keep so many Americans from getting tested and staying healthy.

These three simple steps give each of us the power to stop HIV in our communities, our nation and the world. On World AIDS Day and every day, let us all resolve to do our part, one step at a time.

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