

Public awareness and HIV testing opportunities scheduled in Minnesota

Written by

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Nearly half of the total AIDS cases reported in the U.S. occur among African-Americans, even though they represent just 13 percent of the U.S population, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Almost half of the one million Americans currently living with HIV are African-American.

The tenth annual National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD) will be held Feb. 7 to call attention to the staggering toll HIV/AIDS has had on African-American communities.

“In Minnesota, our most severe HIV infection rates are among African-American and African-born communities,” said Peter Carr, manager of the STD and HIV Section, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).

Minnesota’s African-American and African-born populations continued to have higher rates of infection compared to whites in 2009. Statewide rates for African-Americans were about 12 times greater than whites (50.1 cases versus 4.3 cases per 100,000 population) and rates for African-born communities were 19 to 26 times greater than whites (80 – 113.7 cases versus 4.3 cases per 100,000 population). Through 2008, there were 2,144 African-Americans and African-born people living with HIV in the state.

“The preliminary 2009 data for Minnesota highlights a significant increase in the number of HIV cases among African-American male teens and young men, primarily due to male-to-male sex,” said Carr. “We want to alert these young men to take all precautions they can to prevent HIV infection.”

With the theme of HIV/AIDS Prevention – A Choice and a Lifestyle, national and local organizers hope to raise awareness and encourage African-Americans to get tested, get educated, get treated and get involved within their communities to halt the spread of this disease.

“Education, avoiding or delaying sexual activity, knowing your status, decreasing your number of sexual partners and safer sex practices remain the most effective means of stopping this epidemic,” said Carr. “One of the ways to start is to take advantage of the free HIV educational and testing opportunities occurring as part of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day.”

The STD and HIV Section at MDH currently funds 31 community-based programs aimed at preventing the spread of HIV in adults and young people of all races who are at highest risk of acquiring HIV.

The MDH Web site provides information and a calendar of local activities for NBHAAD at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/hiv/worldaidsday/nbhaad/index.html>

The MDH HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report-2008 and the preliminary 2009 report, which includes data specific for the African-American and African-born communities, can be found on the MDH Web site at: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/hiv/hivstatistics.html> .

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Information about HIV is available from the Minnesota AIDS Project (MAP) AIDSLine, 612-373-2437 (Twin Cities Metro), 1-800-248-2437 (Statewide), 1-888-820-2437 (Statewide TTY), or by e-mail at: mapaidsline@mnaidsproject.org . MAP AIDSLine offers statewide information and referral services, including prevention education, HIV risk assessments, HIV testing and referrals to HIV testing sites.

Free downloadable campaign materials specific for African-American communities are available at: <http://www.greaterthan.org> . For more information about the NBHAAD 2010 observance, visit <http://www.blackaidsday.org/> or call 404-454-5469.