



**EMPLOYEE HEALTH UPDATE:**  
**NATIONAL WOMEN AND GIRLS HIV/AIDS AWARENESS DAY**  
**MARCH 10, 2011**



# Women and Girls are Taking Action in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS

**Now it's time for you to decide: What can you do?**



National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is a nationwide observance that encourages people to take action in the fight against HIV/AIDS and raise awareness of its impact on women and girls. It is coordinated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health (OWH). It helps organizations across the country come together to offer support, encourage discussion, and teach women and girls about prevention of HIV, the importance of getting tested for HIV, and how to live with and manage HIV/AIDS.

National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is observed specifically on March 10 every year, but OWH encourages organizations to hold events throughout the month of March.

[Learn more about National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day.](#)

**Every 35 minutes, a woman tests positive for HIV in the United States. More and more women have become infected with HIV since it was first reported in the early 1980s. Today, about 1 in 4 Americans living with HIV are women. It's time for women to get tested.**

All women need to know about the human immunodeficiency (IH-myoo-noh-dif-FISH-uhn-see) virus, or HIV. HIV causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS, a disease that weakens the body's ability to fight infection and certain cancers.

More and more women have become infected with HIV since it was first reported in the early 1980s. Today, about one in four Americans living with HIV are women. And African American women are most affected. HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death for African American women aged 25 to 34.

The statistics are alarming. But there is good news. Taking some simple steps can protect women from getting HIV — or prevent women from passing it to others, including their children. Also, while there is no cure yet, many women with HIV and AIDS are living longer and stronger lives thanks to a number of new treatments. A wide variety of [government resources](#) also are in place to help people living with HIV. If you are HIV-positive, you will find information and resources to help you manage HIV safely and successfully.

**The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the United States Is REAL—Get the Facts!**

Before we can stop any epidemic, we first have to recognize the magnitude of the disease. HIV is still a threat across the United States. And even though there are treatments to help people with HIV live longer than ever before, AIDS is still a significant health issue. Surprised?

- Every 9½ minutes (on average), someone in the United States is infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- In 2006, an estimated 56,300 people became infected with HIV.
- More than 1 million people in the United States are living with HIV.
- Of those 1 million people living with HIV, 1 out of 5 do not know they are infected. (People who have HIV but don't know it can unknowingly pass the virus to their partners.)
- Despite new therapies, people with HIV still develop AIDS.



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- Over 1 million people in the United States have been diagnosed with AIDS.
- More than 14,000 people with AIDS still die each year in the United States.

### You Can Prevent HIV

Although HIV infection is completely preventable, every 9½ minutes, someone in the United States is infected with the virus. That person could be you—or someone you know—your brother, sister, father, mother, friend, co-worker, or neighbor. It is important for everyone to get the facts, talk about HIV/AIDS with partners and loved ones, reduce risk behaviors, and get tested to learn their HIV status.

### Know Your ABCs to Prevent HIV

Taking simple steps to prevent getting or spreading HIV will pay off both for you and for those you love. An easy way to remember how to prevent getting or spreading HIV through sex is to know your "ABCs."

- ☑ **A** stands for "abstinence" (not having sex of any kind). Abstaining from sexual activities, including vaginal, anal, or oral sex, is the surest way to avoid HIV.
- ☑ **B** is for "be faithful." Being in a sexual relationship with only one partner who is also faithful to you can help protect you. This limits your number of sexual partners and the possibility of infection.
- ☑ **C** is for condoms. Using a male latex condom for all types of sexual contact can greatly lower your risk of getting HIV during sex. If you or your partner is allergic to latex, use polyurethane condoms. If your partner can't or won't use a condom, you can use a female condom. It may protect against HIV, but it's not as good as a male latex condom. **"Natural" or "lambskin" condoms don't protect against HIV.** Be aware that condoms don't provide complete protection against HIV. The only sure protection is abstinence (not having sex of any kind).

### Steps To Lower Your Risk

1. **Don't share needles.** Don't share needles or drug injection equipment for illegal drugs like heroin and cocaine and legal drugs like steroids and vitamins. If you get a tattoo or body piercing, make sure the needles are sterile (clean).
2. **Limit your number of sexual partners.** Your risk of getting HIV goes up with the number of partners you have. Condoms should be used for any sexual activity with a partner who has HIV or with any partner outside of a long-term, faithful sexual relationship. Dental dams also can be used to help lower your risk of getting HIV during oral-vaginal or oral-anal sex.
3. **Know that not all types of birth control will protect you from HIV.** Other methods of birth control, like birth control pills, shots, implants, or diaphragms, will not protect you from HIV. If you use one of these methods, be sure to also use a latex condom or dental dam correctly every time you have sexual contact.
4. **Don't use nonoxynol-9.** Some contraceptives, like condoms, contain the spermicide nonoxynol-9 (N-9). N-9 can irritate the vagina, which might make it easier for HIV to get into your body.
5. **Get screened for STIs.** Having an STI, particularly genital herpes, increases your chances of becoming infected with HIV during sex. If your partner has an STI in addition to HIV, that also increases your risk of HIV infection. If you have an STI, you should also get tested for HIV.
6. **Talk with your partner.** Learn how to talk with your sexual partner about HIV and using condoms. It's up to you to make sure you are protected. Remember, it's *your* body!
7. **Don't douche.** Douching removes some of the normal bacteria in the vagina that protects you from infection. This can increase your risk of getting HIV.
8. **Don't abuse alcohol or drugs,** which is linked to sexual risk-taking. Drinking too much alcohol or using drugs also puts you at risk of sexual assault and possible exposure to HIV.

#### Prevent HIV After Exposure

If you think that the blood or genital fluids of someone you know or suspect to have HIV has entered your body, see a doctor right away. Some research shows that you may be able to prevent HIV infection after exposure if you start taking anti-HIV drugs within three days of exposure and continue treatment for 28 days.

Remember, if you choose not to follow A, B, or C, you could get HIV or other STIs. You can feel proud knowing you are doing your best to keep both you and your partner safe and healthy for life.



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**HIV and AIDS Among African Americans**

By race/ethnicity, African Americans face the most severe burden of HIV in the United States (US). At the end of 2007, blacks accounted for almost half (46%) of people living with a diagnosis of HIV infection in the 37 states and 5 US dependent areas with long-term, confidential, name-based HIV reporting. In 2006, blacks accounted for nearly half (45%) of new infections in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Even though new HIV infections among blacks overall have been roughly stable since the early 1990s, compared with members of other races and ethnicities they continue to account for a higher proportion of cases at all stages of HIV—from new infections to deaths.

Click here for more information:

- ❖ [Burden of HIV Highest for Blacks, CDC Reports](#)
- ❖ [National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day - Statement from National Center for HIV/AIDS Director.](#)

**FACTS**



The number of women with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) has increased steadily worldwide. By the end of 2005, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), 17.5 million women worldwide were infected with HIV.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), between 2000 through 2004, the estimated number of AIDS cases in the United States increased 10 percent among females and 7 percent among

males. In 2004, women accounted for 27 percent of the 44,615 newly reported AIDS cases among adults and adolescents. HIV disproportionately affects African-American and Hispanic women. Together they represent less than 25 percent of all U.S. women, yet they account for more than 79 percent of AIDS cases in women.

Worldwide, more than 90 percent of all adolescent and adult HIV infections have resulted from heterosexual intercourse. Women are particularly vulnerable to heterosexual transmission of HIV due to substantial mucosal exposure to seminal fluids. This biological fact amplifies the risk of HIV transmission when coupled with the high prevalence of non-consensual sex, sex without condom use, and the unknown and/or high-risk behaviors of their partners.

Women suffer from the same complications of AIDS that afflict men but also suffer gender-specific manifestations of HIV disease, such as recurrent vaginal yeast infections, severe pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), and an increased risk of precancerous changes in the cervix including probable increased rates of cervical cancer. Women also exhibit different characteristics from men for many of the same complications of antiretroviral therapy, such as metabolic abnormalities.

Frequently, women with HIV infection have great difficulty accessing health care and carry a heavy burden of caring for children and other family members who may also be HIV-infected. They often lack social support and face other challenges that may interfere with their ability to obtain or adhere to treatment.

**Testing positive**

Testing positive for HIV can bring a range of emotions, such as panic, fear, and anger. But many HIV-positive women find that after some time, they are able to manage their condition and live life to its fullest. If you have just tested positive for HIV, don't give up hope. See [Living with HIV/AIDS](#) to help you find a doctor and the support services you will need. Keep in mind, there are people who care about you and want to help you, even if you have no insurance or money. You don't have to go through this alone.

**Where can I get tested for HIV?**

- Click on this link to find a [testing site near you](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Learn more about HIV testing, prevention, and living with HIV/AIDS at [AIDS.gov](#).

**Together, we have the power to change the course of the HIV epidemic in the United States.**

**Other Articles and Resources:**

1. [Healthy Youth! Sexual Risk Behaviors](#) — This fact sheet provides statistics on young adults' sexual behaviors, including how often they practice safe sex, what percentage have a sexually transmitted infection, and how many are infected with HIV. There are also resources for state and local programs listed on the Web site for further information on priority health risks among youth. <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/index.htm>



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2. [HIV and Its Transmission](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/transmission.htm) — This publication discusses how HIV is transmitted. It examines transmission rates in different environments such as business and home settings and discusses the effectiveness of condoms. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/transmission.htm>
3. [HIV/AIDS Among Women Who Have Sex With Women](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/women/resources/factsheets/wsw.htm) — Women who have sex with women may have a decreased chance of contracting HIV, but they are not risk-free. This fact sheet discusses the ways that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted, even between two females, and what you can do to lower your risk. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/women/resources/factsheets/wsw.htm>
4. [HIV/AIDS Among Youth](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/youth.htm) — Young people in the United States are at persistent risk for HIV infection. This risk is especially notable for youth of minority races and ethnicities. This fact sheet discusses the prevention of HIV/AIDS among adolescents. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/youth.htm>
5. [HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Women](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/graphics/women.htm) — HIV and AIDS is a growing problem among women of all ages. This series of slides tracks the occurrence of HIV and AIDS in women from 1985–2007. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/graphics/women.htm>
6. [Living With HIV/AIDS](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/brochure/livingwithhiv.htm) — This booklet is for people who are HIV-positive. It can help you and your loved ones understand HIV and its effects on health and everyday life. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/brochure/livingwithhiv.htm>
7. [Tips For Teens: The Truth About HIV/AIDS](http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/phd725/) — This publication is part of a series of brochures that provides facts and dispels myths about substance use. It discusses HIV/AIDS and how drug and alcohol abuse can increase your risk of infection. <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/phd725/>
8. [Understanding HIV/AIDS](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/hivinf.htm) — This fact sheet provides an overview of HIV, how HIV causes AIDS, and the HIV lifecycle. It briefly describes early and advanced AIDS symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and current research on HIV. Risky behavior and measures to control the spread of HIV are also discussed. <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/hivinf.htm>
9. [National HIV and STD Testing Resources](http://www.hivtest.org) — This Web site features useful information and resources on HIV testing, including a national database of HIV testing sites, frequently asked questions on HIV and AIDS testing, and resources for people who test positive for HIV. It also provides basic information about HIV and AIDS and behaviors that place a person at risk for HIV infection. <http://www.hivtest.org>.
10. [What the Health Care Law Means for Women - HealthCare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)
11. [HIV/AIDS Strategy – New Agency Operational Plans Available](http://www.hivtest.org)
12. [Statins Might Help HIV Patients, Study Suggests](http://www.hivtest.org)
13. [Mom's HIV May Lower Baby's Immunity to Other Diseases](http://www.hivtest.org)

**Organization Resources:**

- ❖ [AIDS.gov](http://www.aids.gov);
- ❖ [AIDSinfo](http://www.aidsinfo.org)
- ❖ [Division of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome \(DAIDS\), NIAID, NIH, HHS](http://www.niaid.nih.gov)
- ❖ [Divisions of HIV/AIDS Prevention, CDC, HHS](http://www.cdc.gov)
- ❖ [HIV/AIDS Bureau, HRSA, HHS](http://www.hrsa.gov)
- ❖ [National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIH, HHS](http://www.niaid.nih.gov)
- ❖ [National Prevention Information Network, CDC, HHS](http://www.cdc.gov)
- ❖ [American Social Health Association](http://www.asha.org)

*The information contained in this article is from: the United States Department of Health and Human Services/Office of Women's Health – [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov), and [www.girlshealth.gov](http://www.girlshealth.gov) and the Center for Disease Control, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*