

World AIDS Day

December 1, 2019 marked the 32nd annual World AIDS Day Commemoration. Started in 1988, it is an international day dedicated to raising awareness of the AIDS pandemic caused by the spread of HIV infection, mourning those who have died of the disease, and supporting all those affected by the disease. This year's theme is *Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Community by Community*, stressing communities make the difference in diagnosis and prevention of HIV. Approximately 1.1 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV today. About 15 percent of them (1 out of every 7) are unaware they are infected. All types of communities are heightening awareness of AIDS through high profile concerts and the "Names Project" AIDS Quilt to smaller "trees of remembrance" and "human red ribbons".

Some groups of people in the United States are more likely to get HIV than others because of many factors, including the status of their sex partners, their behaviors, and where they live. Gay and bisexual men or anyone who has male to male sexual contact have the largest number of new diagnoses in the United States. African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos are disproportionately affected by HIV compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Also, among the groups at highest risk for HIV infection are transgender women who have sex with men and injection drug users.

There are several ways to prevent getting or transmitting HIV through sex:

- **Get tested for HIV. The CDC recommends routine voluntary testing on everyone, age 13-64.**
- If you are HIV negative, you can use **HIV prevention medications** known as pre-exposure prophylaxis (**PrEP**) or post-exposure prophylaxis (**PEP**) to protect yourself.
- If you are living with HIV, the most important thing you can do to prevent transmission and stay healthy is to **take your HIV medication** (known as **antiretroviral therapy or ART**), every day, exactly as prescribed. Keeping your viral load blood test "undetectable", aids in lowering the public health concern of spreading HIV.
- **Use condoms.** Condoms are highly effective at preventing HIV infection if you use them the right way every time you have sex.
- **Reduce your number of sexual partners.** This can lower your chances of having a partner who could transmit HIV to you.
- **Get tested and treated for other STDs** and encourage your partners to do the same. If you are sexually active, get tested at least once a year. Having other STDs increases your risk for getting or transmitting HIV.
- **Choose less risky sexual behaviors.** HIV is mainly spread by having anal or vaginal sex without a condom or without taking medicines to prevent or treat HIV. Sexual activities that don't involve contact with body fluids (semen, vaginal fluid, or blood) carry no risk of HIV transmission but may pose a risk for other STDs.

A cure for HIV infection is the goal of today's research; every community's goal is the successful daily management of sexual health and wellness. Both should make us feel that we are never alone in this fight. World AIDS Day commemorates the power of the Community!

Statistics accessed from www.HIV.gov