

Fact Sheet

Black Women and HIV

Every 35 minutes, a woman tests positive for HIV in this country. For Black women who account for 9 out of every 10 newly infected females in the U.S. that fact is even more startling. The harsh reality is that 1 in 30 Black women will be diagnosed with HIV at some point in her life. It is startling that despite all of the information that points to the fact that Black women continue to be disproportionately impacted by this disease we have yet to be recognized as a priority population for HIV prevention and treatment efforts. If we are to change this fact any time in the near future there must be a heightened awareness and response among Black women.

Challenging Stigma and Stereotypes

The existence of stigma and stereotypes surrounding HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest barriers to having a meaningful impact on the HIV/AIDS epidemic among Black women. One of the best ways we can begin to raise awareness about and address the epidemic is to take steps to eliminate these barriers. These steps include:

- Eliminating stigma and stereotypes about who is at risk. The primary route of HIV transmission is heterosexual sex. It is important for Black women to understand that any woman who is sexually active is at risk.
- Challenging common misconceptions about why Black women are at increased risk for HIV. One of the biggest obstacles to effective HIV prevention includes persistent myths about gay and bi-sexual men being the biggest contributors to HIV/AIDS risk among Black women. It is important for Black women to understand that the best way to protect themselves from HIV infection is by practicing safer sex during every sexual encounter. This removes placing blame on others and empowers women to take control of their lives and their health.
- Educating communities about HIV/AIDS in order to challenge stereotypes about who is at risk and eliminate myths about how HIV is transmitted.



Black Women's Health Imperative



Learn more at
www.BlackWomensHealth.ORG

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How is HIV/AIDS Transmitted?

Since HIV is transmitted through blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk, any action that includes exposure to these fluids places a person at risk for HIV infection. The modes of HIV transmission are:

- Having unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex with a person infected with HIV. Unprotected sex means not using a male or female condom for vaginal or anal sex or not using a dental dam or other barrier for oral sex.
- Sharing needles or syringes of any kind with a person infected with HIV.
- Transmitting the virus to a child during pregnancy, birth, or through breastfeeding.

The Facts about HIV Prevention

There are steps we can take to protect ourselves or reduce our risk of becoming infected with HIV:

- Get tested for HIV and know our status
- Discuss the issues of testing and safer sex with our partner
- Practice safer sex – use protective latex barriers for vaginal, anal, and oral sex for every sexual encounter
- Abstain from sexual activity
- Avoid injection drug use
- Avoid sharing needles of any kind or works if injecting drugs

The Facts about HIV Testing

People can be infected with HIV for years without knowing it. During this time, they may pass the virus on to other people. You cannot tell if someone has HIV/AIDS by looking at them. The only way to know if someone is HIV positive is by taking an HIV blood or saliva test. That is why it is very important to get tested. For more information on free HIV testing sites, call the National Prevention Information Network at (800) 458-5231 or visit www.nineandahalfminutes.org.

The Facts about Treatment

There is currently no cure for HIV/AIDS. HIV can be effectively treated with antiretroviral therapy. Antiretroviral therapy combines several medicines which help slow down the progression of HIV to AIDS. It is important for people to know their HIV status so that if HIV positive, they can be treated. For more information about HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, visit www.aids.gov.

For more information about our programs please call (202) 548-4000 or visit our website at www.BlackWomensHealth.org.