

SANKOFA FACT SHEET

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Promoting HIV Testing in the African-American Community

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that a quarter of individuals living with HIV, more than 250,000 Americans, do not know they are infected. African-Americans account for approximately half of the more than 1 million Americans currently estimated to be living with HIV, while comprising 13 percent of the U.S. population. People who are infected with HIV but not aware of it are not able to take advantage of the therapies that can keep them healthy and extend their lives, nor do they have the knowledge to protect their sex or drug-use partners from becoming infected. Knowing whether one is positive or negative for HIV confers great benefits in healthy decision-making. Cohort studies have demonstrated that many infected persons decrease behaviors that help transmit infection to sex or needle-sharing partners once they are aware of their positive HIV status. HIV-infected persons who are unaware of their infection do not reduce risk behaviors.



Persons tested for HIV who do not return for test results might even increase their risk for transmitting HIV to partners. Because medical treatment that lowers HIV viral load might also reduce risk for transmission to others, early referral to medical care could prevent HIV transmission in African-American communities while reducing a person's risk for HIV-related illness and death. Integrating HIV testing activities with screening and prevention activities for other infections, such as viral hepatitis, sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis can assist organizations working with populations disproportionately affected by HIV. It is believed that integrating these services can significantly improve health because the African-American population is also disproportionately affected by the above mentioned infections.

HIV prevention organizations have the power to help end the spread of HIV by informing the communities to:

- **Be safe.** To avoid or reduce the risk for HIV, practice the **ABCs** of Smart Behavior. **A** stands for abstinence. **B** stands for being faithful to a single sexual partner. **C** stands for using condoms consistently and correctly. If you do have sex, use a new latex condom every time. Do not share or reuse needles or syringes.
- **Talk about it.** Talk about sex and HIV with your partners. Find out if they have been tested, when they were last tested and what their status is. Be clear that you insist on engaging in safer sex or no sex at all.
- **Talk to healthcare providers.** If you are or have been sexually active, you should get tested for HIV. Do not assume your healthcare provider will ask you to be tested for HIV.
- **Spread the word.** Thousands of African-Americans are contracting HIV each year. Be an example by getting tested and spread the word to others to do the same.



Sources: Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention. (2007). *HIV Testing*. Retrieved June 10, 2008, from <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/testing/index.htm>

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Diffusion of Effective Behavioral Interventions. *The ABCs of smart behavior*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://www.effectiveinterventions.org/go/related-links>

For more information, call the **Mississippi Urban Research Center** at: 1-866-JSU-MURC (578-6872).

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