



NATIONAL GAY MEN'S HIV/AIDS AWARENESS DAY
September 27, 2009

Statement by Dr. Jonathan Mermin
Director, Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention
National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

September 27, 2009 is the second annual National Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NGMHAAD). I applaud the efforts of the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) and many other organizations throughout the United States who are participating in this important event. HIV touches all segments of American society—individuals, families, and communities, young and old, men and women, black and white. However, since the beginning of the epidemic in the United States, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men have been disproportionately affected by HIV. Of all the people newly infected with HIV, men who have sex with men is the only risk group in the U.S. in which new HIV infections are increasing. While new infections have declined among both heterosexuals and injection drug users, the annual number of new HIV infections among men who have sex with men has been steadily increasing since the early 1990s.

A strong, vocal gay community and a solid commitment from gay and bisexual men were critical in reducing new HIV infections among men who have sex with men in the early years of the epidemic and ultimately changing the trajectory of the epidemic in the United States. This early success may have led some people to believe that HIV is no longer a threat for gay and bisexual men, leading to a complacency that mirrors a reduced sense of urgency found in the general public. However, men who have sex with men still account for nearly half of the more than 1 million people living with HIV in the United States, even though this population accounts for a very small percentage of all persons in the United States.

It has been 21 years since the U.S. Surgeon General mailed a brochure about HIV and AIDS to every household in the United States, ensuring that all Americans knew how to protect themselves and others from getting HIV. But many young people at risk for HIV infection today were not yet born in 1988. We must find new ways to prevent HIV, expand the outreach of effective interventions, and educate each generation of young people and their parents, teachers, and mentors. HIV should not be a rite of passage for young gay and bisexual men.

All gay and bisexual men, regardless of age, race, or ethnicity, are at risk for HIV; however, white men who have sex with men represented the highest estimated number

(13,230) of new infections in 2006, followed closely by black men who have sex with men (10,130). Since the beginning of the epidemic, more than 274,000 men who have sex with men with AIDS have died.

There is no single, simple solution to the complex factors that continue to drive risk and transmission of HIV among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men. Stigma and discrimination continue to be driving forces that keep individuals from being tested for HIV. We know that the vast majority of individuals who know they are infected take steps to protect their partners; so knowledge of HIV status is critical to preventing HIV transmission.

We must get the word out that the HIV epidemic among gay and bisexual men in the United States is not over. AIDS continues to claim the lives of far too many gay and bisexual men.

We know that HIV prevention works. However, in order to reduce the burden of HIV on the gay male population, we must not only expand access to prevention services, we must confront challenges such as complacency, homophobia, and stigma that gay and bisexual men continue to face. By working together, we will achieve the greatest impact on this epidemic. Please join me in supporting the second annual National Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Awareness Day by recommitting and refocusing our efforts working with the population most severely affected by HIV in the United States.

###