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Thursday, June 23, 2005

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NIH Encourages African Americans to Discuss Kidney Disease at Family Reunions
New Toolkit Helps Families Make the Kidney Connection

As African Americans across the country prepare for family reunions this summer, NIH is encouraging them to bring “health to the table” by alerting family members about their risks for kidney disease.

The National Kidney Disease Education Program (NKDEP) is launching an initiative this week to encourage African Americans who are attending reunions to reach out to relatives who have leading risk factors for kidney disease—diabetes or high blood pressure.

“Many people know family members who have diabetes or high blood pressure. Our goal is to make them aware of their risk for kidney disease and to encourage them to get tested and take steps to protect their kidneys,” says Dr. Thomas Hostetter, director of NKDEP.

African Americans are four times more likely than whites to develop kidney failure. Furthermore, diabetes and high blood pressure account for 70 percent of kidney failure in African Americans. Because diabetes and high blood pressure run in families, reunions offer good opportunities to discuss kidney disease.

“Kidney disease has no early warning signs,” said Dr. Hostetter. “Not knowing the risks can have disastrous consequences. But there is good news. Once diagnosed, kidney disease can be treated and kidney failure can be prevented or delayed.”

To help families talk about kidney disease, NKDEP has created a free, online Kidney Connection Toolkit containing everything needed to share important kidney health information at reunions, including simple guides for conducting a 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection health discussion, identifying and talking with family members at risk, and distributing kidney disease prevention information to attendees.

Organizations partnering with NKDEP on the initiative are the National Urban League, the International Society on Hypertension in Blacks, the National Medical Association, and the COSHAR Foundation. Partners are spreading the word and the toolkit throughout the summer.

For more information and to download the NKDEP toolkit, visit www.nkdep.nih.gov/familyreunion.

The National Kidney Disease Education Program is an initiative of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, one of the National Institutes of Health.