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NIH Encourages African Americans to Make Health A “Family Reunion” Affair
African Americans at Greater Risk for Diabetes, High Blood Pressure, and Kidney Disease

As African-American families across the country plan their reunions this summer, the National Kidney Disease Education Program (NKDEP), an initiative of the National Institutes of Health, is encouraging them to talk about several health issues that disproportionately affect African Americans—diabetes, high blood pressure, and kidney disease.

The NKDEP urges African Americans attending reunions to reach out to relatives who have diabetes and/or high blood pressure—the leading risk factors for kidney disease. Diabetes and high blood pressure account for 70 percent of kidney failure. African Americans are nearly four times more likely than Caucasians to develop kidney failure.

“Diabetes and high blood pressure are all too common in African-American families,” said Griffin P. Rodgers, M.D., acting director of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). “The NKDEP recognizes reunions as an opportunity for families to discuss how these conditions can cause kidney disease and why it is so important to get tested.”

To help families talk about kidney disease, the NKDEP has created a free Kidney Connection Guide containing fact sheets about diabetes, high blood pressure, and kidney disease. The guide outlines three approaches to promote discussion among family members: presenting a 15-minute Make The Kidney Connection health overview, conducting one-on-one discussions with family members at risk, and distributing kidney disease information to attendees. In addition, the guide encourages families to use the U.S. Surgeon General’s online tool, called “My Family Health Portrait,” to trace illnesses suffered by parents, grandparents, and other relatives.

“Knowing your family history can save your life. It’s important to take advantage of every opportunity to discuss these important medical issues with your loved ones,” says U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H.

The goal of the NKDEP is to make the connection between kidney disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, and to encourage those at high risk to get tested.

“Many people have family members with diabetes or high blood pressure, or both. That’s why it is so important for them to talk to their families about these risk factors for kidney disease, and help them understand there are steps they can take to protect their kidneys,” said Josephine P. Briggs, M.D., director of NIDDK’s Division of Kidney, Urologic, and Hematologic Diseases.

To promote its family reunion initiative, the NKDEP is working with a number of organizations, including the International Society on Hypertension in Blacks, the National Medical Association, and the COSHAR Foundation, which is raising awareness through Kidney Sunday events at

African-American churches nationwide. For more information and to download a free copy of the NKDEP Kidney Connection Guide, 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. The NKDEP aims to raise awareness of the seriousness of kidney disease, the importance of testing those at high risk, and the availability of treatment to prevent or slow kidney failure.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) – The Nation’s Medical Research Agency – includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The NIH is the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit <http://www.nih.gov>.

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