



JAN 30 2006

Dear Colleague:

We are now in the third decade of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The epidemic has changed in many important ways. For example, there have been dramatic declines in the occurrence of new HIV and AIDS cases since the beginning of the epidemic and today, however, the news is not universally positive. Tragically, the majority of those affected by HIV/AIDS are African-Americans and other people of color, which is in contrast to the early years of the epidemic.

The HIV/AIDS and STD epidemics represent very serious health problems for the African-American community. African-Americans bear a disproportionate burden of illness and death from these epidemics. Even though African-Americans comprise only 13 percent of the U.S. populations, the most recent data available from 2004 indicate that they account for:

- 50 percent of estimated new HIV/AIDS cases diagnosed in 33 states;
- 51 percent of the people who died with AIDS;
- 70 percent of the reported cases of gonorrhea; and
- 41 percent of reported cases of primary and secondary syphilis.

In addition, in 2004, incidence rates are substantially higher for African-Americans than for whites for all reported STDs; specifically, 8.4 times higher for chlamydia, 18.9 times higher for gonorrhea, 5.6 times higher for primary and secondary syphilis, and 15.7 times higher for congenital syphilis.

Despite the significant reductions in perinatal HIV transmission and cases of congenital syphilis in the United States, African-American children still remain at risk. In 2004, 71 percent of the infants reported as having HIV/AIDS were African American, and 63 percent of U.S. children younger than 13 years of age who had a new AIDS diagnosis were African-American. Also in 2004, 44 percent of the reported cases of congenital syphilis were among African-American infants.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believes that an increased and urgent response is necessary to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS and STD among African-Americans. Therefore, CDC has established a multi-disciplinary working group to develop a comprehensive action plan that includes short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals to increase and strengthen HIV/AIDS and STD prevention activities for African-Americans and other persons of color who are at high risk for infection.

Over the next several months, CDC will engage with several partner organizations from a broad array of backgrounds and disciplines to critically think about HIV/AIDS and STD prevention issues among African-Americans. It is imperative that we offer opportunities for open dialogue

among HIV and STD prevention leaders and stakeholders within the African-American community. This engagement must include those with whom CDC has not traditionally engaged if we are to have a significant and lasting impact. This dialogue is intended to lead to the development of a comprehensive strategy for CDC and its partners at the local, state, and national level to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS and STDs among African-Americans.

CDC is committed to meeting the public health needs of African-Americans and reducing the burden of the HIV/AIDS and STD epidemics in this community. Although the aforementioned statistics are alarming, CDC has supported numerous efforts and programs that focus on addressing the disproportionate effect that HIV/AIDS has on the African-American community including:

- The National HIV/AIDS Partnership that brings together influential leaders in business, the arts, media and communities to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- Demonstration projects to evaluate rapid HIV testing in historically black colleges and universities and to evaluate the use of social networking strategies to reach and provide HIV counseling, testing, and referral services to persons at high risk of acquiring HIV.
- Social marketing campaigns to address the importance of HIV testing, perinatal HIV transmission, and the reduction of HIV transmission to partners.
- The upcoming National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on February 7, 2006, which CDC supports through funding and technical assistance to national nonprofit organizations.
- Lastly, supporting a total 96 CDC-funded community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide services to African-Americans, including CBOs funded through the Minority AIDS Initiative.

If you would like additional information on CDC's activities focused on reducing HIV/AIDS and STDs among African-Americans, please contact Ms. Megan Foley, Coordinator, African-American Initiative, at (404) 639-8864.

Thank you for your continued commitment and support of HIV and STD prevention efforts in the United States.

Sincerely,


Julie Louise Gerberding, M.D., M.P.H.
Director