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Chicago commemorates World AIDS Day

By GoPride.com News Staff
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World AIDS Day is dedicated to educating and motivating people about HIV and AIDS

CHICAGO, IL -- Thursday, December 1st marks the 23rd anniversary of World AIDS Day, commemorating the 25 million people around the world who have died from the disease since the first reported cases in 1981.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there are more than 1.2 million people in the United States currently living with HIV. One in five of those are unaware they are infected.

There have been significant treatment advances in the 30 years since the first cases emerged and the number of people with HIV who get AIDS has decreased over time because of advances in medical care and ART. Still, more than 16,000 people with AIDS die each year.

Public health care professionals and health care providers say getting an HIV test is the first step to finding out if you have HIV and getting medical care needed to stay healthy longer.

"If you're a gay or bisexual man who is sexually active, ask your doctor for HIV testing every six months," AIDS Foundation President and CEO David Ernesto Munar told ChicagoPride.com. "If you are living with HIV, there is a great amount of hope for a long and healthy future if you take steps to take care of yourself and your partners."

According to the CDC, approximately 50,000 people are newly infected every year. African Americans are disproportionately affected by HIV - while representing approximately 14 percent of the population, they account for approximately 44 percent of new infections. HIV is the third leading cause of death for African American men and women age 35-44.

"Regular medical care and treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS can dramatically improve their health and extend their longevity," reminded Munar. "Find an expert HIV doctor and seek services from an array of local AIDS organizations that can link you to others who are living with HIV and can answer your questions."

The AIDS Foundation of Chicago is one of a number of advocacy organizations and healthcare providers in Chicago helping individuals live with HIV. For more information visit www.aidschicago.org.

The 2011 World AIDS Day theme is, 'Getting to Zero.'

Related: David Ernesto Munar reflects on World AIDS Day

World AIDS Day events in Chicago

The AIDS Foundation of Chicago presents their 10th annual winter soiree, World of Chocolate, Thursday from 6pm-9pm at the Chicago Hilton and Towers, 720 S. Michigan Ave. www.aidschicago.org/chocolate

Whole Foods Market will donate 5% of all sales from Thursday to the Night Ministry, which provides free healthcare, dental care and rapid HIV testing through it's mobile outreach services. Lincoln Park, 1550 N. Kingsbury Ave.; South Loop, 1101 S. Canal St.; Gold Coast, 30 W. Huron St.; Halsted and Waveland, 3640 N. Halsted St.; Lakeview, 3300 N. Ashland Ave.

World AIDS Day Prayer Service St. Joseph, Immaculate Conception, and Bonaventure House will hold a prayer service as part of World AIDS Day. A reception will follow immediately after the service. 6:30pm, St. Joseph Catholic Church, 1107 N. Orleans, www.ic-sjchurch.org

aChurch4Me? and Test Positive Aware Network (TPAN) present a nondenominational Memorial Service to remember and honor loved ones lost to AIDS; followed by a reflection in the present of living with HIV/AIDS. 7pm-8:30pm, TPAN offices, 5537 N. Broadway

TPAN, 5537 N. Broadway, will also provide free HIV testing and counseling from 10am-8pm as part of it's regular health services. www.tpan.org

Howard Brown Health Center will offer free HIV testing at the Brown Elephant, 5404 N. Clark, Thursday from 2pm-5pm. www.howardbrown.org

The Chicago Department of Public Health will kick off city-wide condom distribution aimed at making condoms available and accessible with the goal of prevent HIV. The efforts will take place during the Thursday morning rush at the following CTA stops: Howard Street (Redline), 95th Street (Redline), Logan Square (Blue line), Austin (Green line) and Lake Street - Thompson Center (all lines).