

# Getting the message to... *Communities of Faith*

## *HIV Facts*

- 850,000–950,000 people in the United States are infected with HIV.
- About 250,000 people are infected with HIV but don't know it.
- 250,000 people are living with HIV and know their status, but are not receiving care or prevention support.

## *What is HIV?*

HIV, or Human Immunodeficiency Virus, is an infection that causes the body to lose its natural defenses against disease. People infected with HIV lose the ability to fight off illness, infections, and cancer. When the body can no longer fight off certain infections, a person is diagnosed with AIDS.

## *What is AIDS?*

AIDS, or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, is caused by the HIV virus. AIDS is the final and most severe stage of HIV infection. AIDS leaves the body's immune system unable to fight off infections, cancers, and other diseases. It can take up to 10 years or more to develop AIDS after being diagnosed with HIV.

## *What is an HIV test?*

An HIV test tells you if you have been infected with the HIV virus by detecting antibodies that your immune system makes to try to fight the virus. The HIV test provides people an opportunity to learn their current HIV status, receive counseling about any behavioral changes needed to avoid infection or infecting others, and receive information and referrals to additional prevention programs, medical care, or other services.

## *Why is it important to get tested and to know your HIV status?*

It's better to know! If you've never been tested, or if you've had unprotected sex or shared a needle since your last test, now is the time to get an HIV test. You can get health care and treatment if you test positive. Take the Test. Take Control.

## *Where can you get tested?*

For testing locations in your area that are free and private, call the National AIDS Hotline.  
800-342-AIDS (English)  
800-344-SIDA (Español)  
Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National HIV Testing Resources Web site at [www.hivtest.org](http://www.hivtest.org) to find a testing site near you.

## *What can you do to protect yourself against HIV?*

- Abstinence – Not having sex is the only 100% sure way to avoid HIV infection from sex.
- Be Faithful – Having a mutual and monogamous relationship with another noninfected person will protect against HIV infection.
- Condom use – Using a condom correctly and consistently will reduce the risk of HIV infection.
- Diagnosis – Having an HIV test and knowing your status can save your life.
- Not sharing intravenous needles.

## *What can Faith Communities do to encourage and support HIV testing?*

- Promote National HIV Testing Day on June 27.
- Provide educational materials and information sessions on HIV testing.
- Provide space for a Mobile HIV Testing Unit. Encourage people to know their HIV status and get tested.

