Today is National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

February 7, 2011 By Aundaray Guess

Today is National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. It's a day to bring continued attention to the disease that is rising dramatically in black communities. It's a two-fold event. It's a day for African-Americans and those of African descent, no matter what your sexuality is; gay, straight or bi to take your head out of the sand and find out what your status is.

Already there are those who are in a relationship and feel that the day doesn't apply to them, but in reality unless you know every single action of your partner, then you should be tested. People sometimes feel that since he/she comes home at the same time everyday, he/she's being faithful. I hate to burst your bubble but just take a look at the website Craigslist.org and look at how many married people are looking for a discreet lunchtime encounter.

But this day can also be one of a frank communication between two parties and a commitment to both get tested together without any accusation or suspensions. Often the idea of introducing a condom into an already establish relationship brings up issues of mistrust. But no matter how much you love someone, you still have to take responsibility for your own health and not leave it in any other hands.

The second part of the day is to acknowledge and pay respect to those who are living with the disease and those who are affected by the disease. We have so many walking around unaware of their status and still having unprotected sex. Some areas of the black communities are exceeding parts of Africa when it comes to HIV/AIDS rates. Grandparents are now raising their grandchild.

Often times we want to focus on the thousand conspiracy theories of how HIV was introduced into the black community, but we don't want to look at he the one ac that will protect ourselves from the virus. I hate to tell you but the train has already left the station. How HIV got here doesn't matter now. What matters is that it's here and how do we stop its rising infection rates.

Lastly there are those who ask why have a day that focuses on only one segment of an ethnic group and isn't it another form of division.

The answer is no. The CDC numbers speak for themselves that African-Americans are heavily affected by this disease. Why? Factor in access to unbalanced health care, poverty, stigmatization from community, home and church and racism, underlining factors often not discussed, and the answer is clear. Also to be frank if we're looking at the gay community in general, now that rates are decreased in their group, they've now moved on to other issues such as gay marriage and taken the position that the disease doesn't apply to me.

If we look at the worth that is placed on a black person’s life, adding in self-esteem so low they have to reach up just to touch bottom, the message of prevention gets lost. And if we look at poverty, the sad truth is that getting HIV is not high on the list, especially when it’s topped by-am I going to afford my rent this month, will I be able to have money for food, are my lights going to be shut off this month, will I finally find a job in this economy?. Those barriers unfortunately make HIV last as a priority.

And I don’t want to let those who are 50 and over off the hook as rates are rising in that age range as they may feel because of their age they have nothing to worry about. The truth is this type of complacency is why rates are rising. I’ll admit your faces are not on the prevention posters, as its usually young men in their twenties, but the truth of the matter is that the disease does not discriminate based on age.

Wouldn’t you want to know and treat something before it has done its damage? And if not for you then at least by getting tested you and your partner/wife/husband will know

But don’t let the day pass without thinking of the impact of HIV/AIDS on our community and our lives.

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