



For Immediate Release:

June 9, 2010

Progress in Fight against HIV: No Infants Diagnosed with HIV in 2009 and Adults with HIV are Living Longer

The bad news: number of adults living with HIV is increasing

LOS ANGELES – A new report from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health finds that no infants were diagnosed with HIV in 2009 and finds that adults with confirmed HIV are living longer before developing AIDS. The report, titled “*The 2009 Epidemiologic Profile of HIV and AIDS in Los Angeles County*,” tracks the risk factors behind the spread of HIV/AIDS and any changes in those infected with HIV/AIDS in order to help guide efforts of treatment and prevention.

“While it is heartening to see that treatment has allowed those with HIV to live longer, healthier lives, and education and drug therapy has helped prevent the spread of HIV from infected mothers to their babies, much more work needs to be done,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “It is important that we continue educating people that HIV is a preventable disease, and that access to free HIV testing, treatment, medication and care is available. One new case of HIV is one too many for Los Angeles County.”

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that weakens the body’s immune system and ultimately causes this system to fail. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the life-threatening stage of HIV disease and is the medical diagnosis for someone whose immune system is so damaged that certain diseases, such as pneumonia or tuberculosis, or cancers can develop and become fatal.

The good news from the report:

- 2009 became the first year LA County could report a zero transmissions of HIV from infected mothers to their babies, since the implementation of pediatric HIV surveillance reporting in 1999. Of the 79 HIV-infected pregnant women delivering in 2009 and identified by the department’s surveillance project, 98% had received critical drug therapy during pregnancy and/or during labor and delivery, leading to this success.
- The number of AIDS cases diagnosed each year continues to drop, from nearly 2,800 in 1996 to fewer than 1,400 in 2006. Similarly, the number of deaths from AIDS has dropped from 1,800 in 1996 to approximately 540 in 2006. This is largely due to highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), a combination of drugs that either attack parts of HIV or stop the virus from entering blood cells and advancing.
- A study titled *Young Men Taking Charge* found that many Latino and African American young men are more likely to continue successful HIV care when counseled by a culturally sensitive case manager.



The bad news from the report:

- The number of residents in LA County living with HIV/AIDS continues to increase. It is now estimated that more than 62,000 people are infected with HIV and AIDS, and over one in five of that number is not aware they are infected (according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
- Though African Americans make up only nine percent of the county's population, they account for 22% of those living with HIV/AIDS.
- While people are living longer with HIV before developing AIDS, these individuals need to balance HAART drug side effects on their kidneys, liver and other organs, and HAART drug interactions with other health conditions, such as heart disease.
- Of study participants diagnosed with AIDS, nearly three out of four Latinos said they did not know they were infected until very late in the course of the disease (within 12 months of their AIDS diagnosis), often getting tested only after they were already ill or hospitalized.

“Studies have shown that individuals who are unaware they are infected with HIV account for the majority of new HIV infections each year,” said Dr. Fielding. “It is critical that everyone in LA County know their HIV status, even if they do not think they are at risk. Getting tested for HIV does not automatically mean you are promiscuous or a drug user. It means that you are in control of your health and are taking steps to protect the health of others.”

What is Public Health doing to combat HIV/AIDS?

- Providing free, rapid HIV testing through the department's Office of AIDS Programs and Policy (OAPP).
- Providing free treatment and care for individuals living with HIV/AIDS, even if they cannot afford it.
- Providing health education and risk reduction counseling to those at risk for HIV-infection or those living with HIV/AIDS.
- Normalizing HIV testing through public awareness campaigns and community events such as health fairs. There are also efforts underway to make HIV testing a routine part of an individual's medical checkup in health clinics and doctor's offices.

For information on accessing free HIV testing, care and treatment, visit <http://www.erasedoubt.org> or call (800) 367-AIDS (2437). For a full copy of the *2009 Epidemiologic Profile of HIV and AIDS in Los Angeles County*, visit <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/hiv/index.htm>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth.

###