

In Florida, 16 non-Hispanic black women die from HIV/AIDS each week. In addition, 1 in 68 non-Hispanic black females are living with a diagnosed case of HIV/AIDS. In comparison, approximately 1 in 1,281 non-Hispanic white females, and 1 in 472 Hispanic females live with the disease. These rates are unacceptable. Since 2005, the World AIDS Day campaign theme has been "Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise." The campaign encourages continued commitment from policymakers and leaders to keep their promise to achieve universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care, and support by the year 2010. As individuals, "Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise," is also a call to action to address HIV/AIDS where you live, work, play, and worship.

In an effort to address the disproportionate impact that HIV/AIDS is having among Florida's black women, the Florida Department of Health, Bureau of HIV/AIDS convened a Sistas Organizing to Survive (SOS) conference in June 2008. During the conference, black women across the state of Florida pledged to educate, empower, and encourage their sistas to be tested for HIV. Today on World AIDS Day, I am asking you to renew that commitment to educate black women where they live, work, play, and worship.

The goal of the SOS initiative is to test 100,000 black women each year by 2010. We are very close to reaching that goal, but we need your help. During the entire month of December, I am asking that you commit to helping us get 100,000 black women tested in the State of Florida.

People who know their HIV status are more likely to take precautions to prevent their partners from becoming infected than people who do not know they are positive. That is why I believe that all of us need to take responsibility for knowing our own and our partners' HIV status. Knowledge also empowers us with choices, including the option of whether to have unprotected sex or even to have sex at all. **Knowing is greater than doubt!** Acknowledging and confronting our risk of HIV/AIDS can be scary. Sometimes it seems easier to allow myths and misinformation to paralyze us and prevent us from taking action.

The best Christmas gift a person can have this year is an HIV test. Please take the test today and encourage others to take the test where you live, work, play, and worship.

Ronald Henderson

Statewide Minority AIDS Coordinator

Bureau of HIV/AIDS

4052 Bald Cypress Way, Mail Bin A09

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1715

Phone: (850) 245-4433 Office or (850) 491-0350 Cell

E-mail Address: ronald_henderson@doh.state.fl.us