



HEALTH AWARENESS

Three Things To Know About AIDS

(NAPSA)—Everybody should know at least three things about AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and HIV, the virus that causes it, according to Dr. Victoria Cargill of the Office of AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH): Know how it's spread, know your HIV status, and know that your life can go on productively even if you test positive.

Most people know that HIV can be spread in several ways: from mother to child at birth; via unprotected sex with an infected person; or by sharing needles with someone who is infected. "We have been very successful in lowering mother-to-child transmission rates in the U.S.," Cargill says, "but that can only work if expectant mothers get prenatal care. We have to continue to tell pregnant women to see a doctor and get tested. We have to emphasize to everyone that any unprotected sexual contact—oral, anal or vaginal—can spread the virus. We have to stress that blood contamination can come not only via needles used for injecting drugs, but also needles used for piercing, as well as any drug paraphernalia. Any of these can become contaminated with blood and therefore any of them can become a vehicle for HIV infection."

But, Cargill says, "HIV/AIDS can be treated, and the treatments are very effective. The new generation of drug therapies continues to improve at delaying the onset of AIDS and allowing people to go back to full and productive lives. We could save so many more lives, if people only understood the benefit of treatment."

Cargill thinks that even people



at very low risk should consider getting tested to make sure of their HIV status. Doctors highly recommend testing for anyone who suspects he or she might have been exposed to the virus—by having unprotected sex or sharing needles, for example—and begins to experience low-grade fever, night sweats, weakness, fatigue or a rash within six weeks or so.

Some other medical problems can indicate HIV infection as well. For example, women who have repeated yeast infections within a year that are not related to diabetes or taking birth control pills may harbor an HIV infection. Adults diagnosed with oral thrush who are not undergoing cancer chemotherapy or have not had organ transplantation, and people under age 40 who develop shingles or herpes zoster and have no other associated medical conditions should also strongly consider taking an HIV test.

If you have concerns, talk with your doctor about getting tested. Patients who get regular care and take their medications as prescribed can often go back to full and productive lives. For more information, call the national HIV/AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS; TTY: 1-800-243-7889; Spanish: 1-800-344-7432.