

Jan. 16, 2008

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**MEDIA NOTE:** The Sarasota County Health Department and other community based organizations that are part of the HIV/AIDS Network of Sarasota County will offer free HIV testing as part of the local observance of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. A schedule of those offerings is at the end of this release.

## Prevention is power: Reduce HIV/AIDS in the black community

Free HIV testing and educational information will be available at various locations in Sarasota County from Feb. 4 - 7 as part of the 9<sup>th</sup> annual National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day observance. This year's theme, "Prevention is Power," focuses on educating, empowering and mobilizing our local black community in the fight against HIV/AIDS. "We urge you to *get tested* and know your HIV status; *get educated* about the way HIV/AIDS is spread; *get involved* in local community prevention efforts; and *get treated* if you are currently living with HIV or are newly diagnosed," said Dr. Lisa Merritt, Director of the Community Gatekeeper Project.

Sarasota County Health Department's HIV/AIDS Director Dr. William Heymann, says, "AIDS can be treated with drugs to slow the progression of the disease. However, too often HIV status is learned after the infection has progressed to the point of needing emergency room care. Knowing your HIV status can help you get into medical treatment earlier, take steps to stay healthy, and keep from spreading the virus to others." The Gatekeeper Project trains and equips volunteers to provide HIV testing and education at community events, and existing testing sites in the community. We network with organizations such as the HIV/AIDS Network of Sarasota County (HANS), The Newtown Health Advisory Council, Newtown Community Health Action Team, Front Porch Initiative, and the Truvine Teen Health Project. Working together at a "grass roots" level, we can reduce the stigma and help folks to see that HIV infection and AIDS are now viewed by the medical community as a chronic disease, like diabetes or high blood pressure," says Dr. Merritt.

HIV testing is fast and easy. People have a choice of getting the OraSure® HIV test or a traditional blood test. OraSure® testing consists of placing a treated cotton pad resembling a toothbrush between a person's cheek and gums for two minutes. It is easier than brushing your teeth. Those who go to Project Unity and Community AIDS Network (CAN) sponsored HIV testing sites will receive the Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test, a finger stick, which provides preliminary test results in only 20 minutes. Test results are always kept private and are not shared with anyone, including family members, significant others, employers or landlords. The Sarasota County Health Department staff can assist those who test positive in getting access to health care and treatment. "We hope people will come out and get tested – it's the only way to be sure," says Dr. Merritt.

As with other communities, Sarasota County is experiencing a disparity among African Americans who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Blacks represent only four percent of the population in Sarasota County yet, over two thirds of people living with HIV/AIDS in the county are black. The two greatest risk factors are unprotected sex -- males having sex with other males and then infecting a female partner, and sharing needles or syringes. If you have never been tested, or have had unprotected sex or shared a needle since your last test, now is the time to get an HIV test.

For more information on HIV testing opportunities, call the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 or visit the HANS website [www.hivсарasota.org](http://www.hivсарasota.org)

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**HIV/AIDS Network of Sarasota  
Sarasota County National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day activities  
Feb. 4 - 7, 2008**

**Free HIV Testing/Screening (Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test – preliminary test results in 20 minutes)  
Monday, Feb. 4; 9:30 a.m. to Noon**

Fredd “Glossie” Atkins Park in Health In Motion Mobile Medical Unit  
2700 N. Washington Blvd.  
(southwest corner: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Washington Blvd. (U.S. Highway 301)  
Sarasota, 34234  
Contact: John Acevedo  
Sponsoring Agency: Community AIDS Network and Sarasota County Health Department

**Free HIV Testing /Screening  
Monday, Feb. 4 – Thursday, Feb. 7; Noon to 3 p.m.**

Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida  
1958 Prospect St., Sarasota 34239  
Contact: Marilyn Anderson, 941-955-1860  
Sponsoring Agency: Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida

**Free HIV Testing /Screening (Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test – preliminary test results in 20 minutes)  
Monday, Feb. 4; 1 to 3 p.m.**

La Canasta  
2268 Fruitville Road, Sarasota 34237  
Contact: John Acevedo 941-366-0461  
Sponsoring Agency: Community AIDS Network and Sarasota County Health Department

**Free HIV Testing/Screening  
Monday, Feb. 4; 10 to 11:30 a.m.**

Resurrection House  
507 Kumquat Ct., Sarasota 34237  
Contact: April Glasco 941-360-8660  
Sponsoring Agency: Second Chance Last Opportunity

**Free HIV Testing /Screening (Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test – preliminary test results in 20 minutes)  
Monday, Feb. 4; 3 to 6:30 p.m.**

Selby Goodwill Jobs Center  
1781 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Sarasota 34234  
Contact: Bill Carter, 941-256-6620  
Sponsoring Organization: Project Unity and Community AIDS Network (CAN)

**Free HIV Testing /Screening (Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test – preliminary test results in 20 minutes)**

Tuesday, Feb. 5; 9:30 a.m. to Noon  
Englewood Goodwill Center  
410 Indiana Ave., Englewood 34223  
Contact: John Acevedo 941-366-0461  
Sponsoring Agency: Community AIDS Network and Sarasota County Health Department

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**Sarasota County National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day activities  
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**Free HIV Testing /Screening (Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test – preliminary test results in 20 minutes)  
Tuesday, Feb. 5; 1 to 3 p.m.**

Elsie Quirk Library  
100 Dearborn St., Englewood 34223  
Contact: John Acevedo 941-366-0461  
Sponsoring Agency: Community AIDS Network and Sarasota County Health Department

**Free HIV Testing /Screening (Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test – preliminary test results in 20 minutes)  
Wednesday, Feb. 6; 9:30 a.m. to Noon**

Wal Mart Super Center  
17000 Tamiami Trail, North Port 34287  
Contact: John Acevedo 941-366-0461  
Sponsoring Agency: Community AIDS Network and Sarasota County Health Department

**Free HIV Testing /Screening (Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test – preliminary test results in 20 minutes)  
Wednesday, Feb. 6; 1 to 3 p.m.**

Riley Chase Apartment  
1015 Panacea Blvd., North Port 34289  
Contact: John Acevedo 941-366-0461  
Sponsoring Agency: Community AIDS Network and Sarasota County Health Department

**Free HIV Testing /Screening (Rapid Ora Quick HIV Test – preliminary test results in 20 minutes)  
Thursday, Feb. 7; 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

Salvation Army  
1400 Tenth St., Sarasota 34236  
Contact: John Acevedo 941-366-0461  
Sponsoring Agency: Community AIDS Network and Sarasota County Health Department

**Free HIV Testing/Screening and Syphilis testing  
Thursday, Feb. 7; 2 to 4 p.m.**

Fredd "Glossie" Atkins Park  
2700 N. Washington Blvd.  
(southwest corner: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Washington Blvd. (U.S. Highway 301)  
Sarasota, 34234  
Contact: Gary Ervin 941-861-2919  
Sponsoring Agency: Sarasota County Health Department

**Free HIV Testing/Screening  
Thursday, Feb. 7; 2 to 6 p.m.**

Also Out Youth  
1470 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota 34236  
Contact: Nathan Rifenberg, 941-951-2576  
Sponsoring Agency: Also Out Youth

**Free HIV Testing/Screening  
Thursday, Feb. 7; 7 to 9 p.m.**

Crossroads Church  
4726 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota 34234  
Contact: April Glasco 941-360-8660  
Sponsoring Agency: Second Chance Last Opportunity

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