



State launches anti-HIV campaign

By Shadee Malaklou, The Herald-Sun
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DURHAM -- Think you're not affected by HIV? Think again.

According to a new campaign, all N.C. residents are at least indirectly affected by the virus that causes AIDS.

The state Department of Health and Human Services announced a new campaign Wednesday in the fight against HIV/AIDS called "Get Real. Get Tested."

"The campaign recognizes that we -- all of us -- suffer from HIV/AIDS," said Evelyn Foust, head of N. C. HIV/STD Prevention and Care. "HIV is not just about somebody else."

The campaign is a partnership between the Division of Public Health, Duke University and UNC health systems and TV station FOX 50. The news conference at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Convention Center included doctors, panelists and community leaders.

"Over 30,000 people are living with HIV/Aids in North Carolina, and there are 1,800 new cases that emerge each year," said state Health Director Leah Devlin.

Another physician said that up to 40 percent of people living with HIV/AIDS don't know their status related to the disease.

"Get Real. Get Tested" encourages those who have never been tested for HIV/AIDS to get tested, to identify those living with HIV/AIDS who need care, to provide HIV/AIDS education and encourage prevention.

Another goal is to change the image of the disease.

"This is no longer a gay, white, male virus. HIV/AIDS is also a drug addict's and homeless person's disease. It's everyone's disease, and it's not just transmitted through sex," said Dr. Michelle Ogle of Northern Outreach Clinic. "It's about poverty, it's about a lack of education, and it's about a lack of

resources."

The campaign comes in response to the Health Department's 2006 Epidemiologic Profile, and is consistent with the newly released Center for Disease Control (CDC) HIV counseling and testing guidelines. "Several months ago when [North Carolina] released our reports, we saw 1,800 new cases of HIV/AIDS," said Foust. "30 percent of the 1,800 new cases were late stage AIDS cases, and that's unacceptable. Not only are people entering into care very sick, but that also means that they've been out there for a while spreading the virus."

The most vocal voice at the press conference came from the Rev. William J. Barber, president of the state NAACP.

"Along with this campaign needs to be a real grassroots effort," said Barber. "There's a reason people don't get tested, and that's because 6-8 percent of them are minorities. This is a real civil rights issue. This problem is killing more people than the Ku Klux Klan ever did."

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