



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruth Hassell-Thompson

## Senator Hassell-Thompson Recognizes December as Aids Awareness Month

RUTH HASSELL-THOMPSON December 5, 2011

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Although the joyful month of December is upon us and the holiday season is in full swing, it is also a time to remember that this month is AIDS Awareness Month. As a former nurse and health educator who worked with persons infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS, Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson urges all New Yorkers to remember that AIDS is still a major health threat.

“New York is the center of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States, and we must be leaders to the rest of the nation by providing the best education and innovative treatment services. HIV infection can be managed when detected early, so it is critical for individuals to be tested,” said Senator Hassell-Thompson.

“Everyone has been touched, whether directly or indirectly, by someone living with HIV/AIDS.”

High-risk individuals should be tested as soon as possible, and can often do so for free at local health clinics.

You may be at increased risk for infection if you have

- injected drugs or steroids, during which equipment (such as needles, syringes, cotton, water) and blood were shared with others
- had sex, without using condoms, with multiple partners, anonymous partners, or with men who have sex with men
- exchanged sex for drugs or money
- been given a diagnosis of, or been treated for, hepatitis, tuberculosis (TB), or a sexually transmitted disease (STD) such as syphilis
- had unprotected sex with someone who has any of the risk factors listed above

Young people are at particular risk for HIV infection, especially ethnic and minority teenagers. African Americans have been disproportionately affected by HIV infection, accounting for 55% of all HIV infections reported among young people aged 13–24.

It is estimated that more than one million people are living with HIV in the USA and that more than half have died after developing the AIDS virus. With these daunting statistics, this year World AIDS Day is rallying behind the theme, “*Leading With Science, Uniting for Action.*”

For those living with HIV/ AIDS, medical advances continue to improve the quality of life with counseling programs available across New York State. HIV prevention, outreach and education efforts continue to evolve, including programs on abstinence and on delaying the initiation of sex. In past legislative sessions, the New York State Senate has passed several measures supporting the fight against AIDS.

Some of these bills include,

- S8227: Mandating the Offer of Voluntary HIV Testing in All Health Care Settings;
- S7724: Expanding Safe, Legal Access to Needle Exchange Programs;
- S7829: AIDS Assisted Living Programs;
- S2664: HIV Shelter Costs

To learn more about counseling and testing services available in New York, visit <http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/aids/index.htm>.

To learn more about what you can do toward the fight against AIDS, this World AIDS Day and every other day of the year, visit <http://aids.gov/world-aids-day/>

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