



Jeb Bush  
Governor

John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H.  
Secretary

**For Immediate Release**  
October 15, 2004

Contact: Lindsay Hodges  
(850) 245-4111

### **DOH Recognizes National Latino AIDS Awareness Day**

**Tallahassee** — The Florida Department of Health (DOH) recognizes October 15, 2004 as National Latino AIDS Awareness Day. This observance demonstrates the department's commitment to increasing HIV/AIDS awareness in Florida's Latino communities, increasing efforts to reduce new infections and providing care and treatment for those living with HIV/AIDS. On this important day, Latinos and all Floridians are encouraged to learn more about HIV, about how the disease is transmitted and how it can be prevented. This year's theme is "Abre Los Ojos: El VIH No Tiene Fronteras" ("Open your Eyes: HIV Has No Borders.")

"National Latino AIDS Awareness Day provides an important opportunity to focus attention on the seriousness of this disease in our Latino communities," DOH Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H. said. "I commend our Latino leaders and community organizations for their ongoing efforts to increase HIV/AIDS awareness and ensure a healthier outcome for Latinos infected with this disease."

DOH estimates that one in 176 Hispanics in Florida has HIV compared to one in 346 whites. As many as one in four people in Florida who are living with HIV do not know they are infected. Early diagnosis is critical in the effective treatment of HIV and in our efforts to stop the spread of this disease.

Testing and prevention remain key components in stopping the spread of HIV. Being tested is an essential first step in obtaining treatment. Testing also enables infected individuals to take the steps necessary to protect their partners from infection. The new rapid HIV test, which gives preliminary results in approximately 20 minutes, is now available. However, Latinos are more likely than whites to test late in their illness, when life-extending antiretroviral treatments might not be as effective.

DOH and local county health departments partner with numerous community-based organizations throughout the state to provide confidential and convenient testing locations and appointment times. This helps to ensure people return for test results and counseling. While it is important on National Latino AIDS Awareness Day to make testing accessible and available to as many people as possible, it is equally important to provide high-quality prevention counseling and risk assessment to ensure that those tested learn their HIV status.

Once people learn they are infected with HIV, they are linked directly into primary medical care, social support systems and other services that can help them live long, productive lives.

The Bureau of HIV/AIDS has implemented a number of initiatives to reach Latinos. Recently, the bureau formed a Florida Latino Advisory Committee to bring the voices of Latino leaders together in an advisory role to discuss and address issues they are facing in receiving HIV prevention and care services in their communities.

For more information about HIV/AIDS visit [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us). For a complete list of events in your area, contact your local county health department.

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