

## Knowing is greater than doubt

Written by Phill Wilson NNPA Columnist  
Friday, 18 June 2010 14:55

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(NNPA) - What you need to know about HIV testing and why Black people should get tested on this June 27th, National HIV Testing Day.

Scientific denialists have been around since, well... the beginning of recorded science. One group of denialists refused to believe that the earth was round. Another group insisted that the sun revolved around the earth until long after scientific evidence had proved it works the other way around. A group of denialists wants us to believe that President Obama is Muslim, while another group, called "birthers," continues to challenge his presidency because they refuse to believe he was born in the United States. It should come as no surprise that there are AIDS denialists as well. Typically they either reject the fact that AIDS exists, disagree that HIV causes AIDS, claim that AIDS is caused by the very medications designed to treat it, or try to dissuade people from getting HIV tested. Given the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic in Black America, we cannot allow ourselves to be either distracted or bamboozled by these types of dubious claims. In fact, we should consider AIDS denialists not only dangerous, but even enemies of our community. Nevertheless, with all the myths and misinformation swirling around about HIV/AIDS, I completely understand how some of us might be nervous about getting tested. Let's consider the facts.

Nearly 500,000 of the 1.2 million Americans living with HIV/AIDS are Black. Nearly 40 percent of Black Americans have a family member or close family friend who is living with or has died from HIV/AIDS. I have been living with HIV for nearly 30 years. Those of us living with HIV/AIDS or who have lost family and friends to it know painfully well that the connection between HIV and AIDS is not theoretical; it is very, very real. I also know first hand the benefits of getting

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HIV-tested early, receiving love and support from family and friends, and having access to appropriate care. I thank God that no denialist was by my bedside in 1996, when my doctors thought I had less than 24-hours to live and insisted I start new medical therapies. I am alive today and am living proof of the benefits of medical treatment.

Whether we're talking about their blood pressure, blood glucose, blood cholesterol or HIV status, every person needs as much information as possible to make informed decisions about their health. An HIV test tells us whether we have the virus that causes AIDS. When people who are HIV-positive know it, they can obtain the same kinds of life-extending and life-saving care and treatment that has helped me, including medications that can delay or even prevent some life-threatening conditions. People who know their HIV status are also more likely to take precautions to prevent their partners from becoming infected than people who don't know they are positive. That's why I believe that all of us need to take responsibility for knowing our own and our partners' HIV status, and everyone should have access to HIV testing regardless of their ability to pay. Knowledge also empowers us with choices, including the option of whether to have unprotected sex or even to have sex at all. Knowing is greater than doubt.

Can the results of an HIV test be incorrect? Yes, but rarely. Similar to other screening tests—for various cancers, diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.—the test yields a very low number of inaccurate results. This is why positive HIV-test results are always confirmed by an additional test and why sexually active individuals are encouraged to get tested at least once a year even if they have tested negative in the past.

Acknowledging and confronting our risk of HIV/AIDS can be scary. Sometimes it seems easier to allow myths and misinformation to paralyze us and prevent us from taking action. But it would be tragic if we were to allow urban legends, conspiracy theories and fear-mongering about HIV/AIDS and HIV testing to drag us backwards so that we relive the suffering and death that existed during the 1980s. There is a drastic difference between the healing and self-empowerment that happens in communities that confront HIV/AIDS directly and the death and devastation that takes place in communities that do not. Black Americans represent nearly half of the nation's new HIV/AIDS cases and nearly half of the AIDS-related deaths because for far too long, we either pretended that AIDS was not real or that it was somebody else's problem. Fortunately, in recent years Black leaders, institutions and community members have started to mobilize to confront HIV directly and honestly.

Ask anyone infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS, and they will tell you that AIDS is no joke. We must avail ourselves of all of the possible tools at our disposal: participating in clinical trials, early access to appropriate care and treatment, using condoms properly, educating ourselves about every aspect of the disease and getting tested. Knowing is greater than doubt.

*Phill Wilson is the President and CEO of the Black AIDS Institute, the only National HIV/AIDS think tank in the United States focused exclusively on Black people. The Greater Than AIDS movement responds to the AIDS crisis in the United States, in particular the severe and disproportionate epidemic among Black Americans. To learn more go to [www.greaterthan.org](http://www.greaterthan.org) or [www.facebook.com/greaterthanids](http://www.facebook.com/greaterthanids).*