

PRESS RELEASE

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TAILORED HIV PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR AFRICANS LIVING IN ENGLAND.

Testing is the only way you can tell if you are infected with HIV is the message emphasised in the new HIV testing campaign by the African HIV Policy Network (AHPN). The campaign is part of the Department of Health funded National African HIV prevention (NAHIP) programme.

Having an HIV test is the only way to know for sure if you are infected. The sooner the diagnosis, the more likely it is that HIV treatments will keep you healthy. The campaign carries the theme *TALK and TEST* and aims to signpost those who wish to TALK about their concerns regarding testing for HIV and living with HIV, to a free and confidential helpline 0800-0967-500.

Visitors to www.doitright.uk.com, can access facts and figures about HIV, find out more about the HIV test, and can complete an interactive HIV information quiz (*Life check*), providing a range of information from the basics of HIV to taking treatment.

TALK and TEST builds on the findings of the latest Bass Line survey of 2,500 Africans living in England. The Bass Line survey was commissioned by AHPN and undertaken by Sigma Research. Its aim was to provide a better understanding of the gaps in HIV prevention within African communities in England.

Bass Line 2008-09 suggested that almost 40% of African people in England had never tested for HIV, and among them, almost 10% were too afraid they might have HIV to test. About one-in-eight (12.2%) of those completing the survey wanted to test for HIV but did not know where to go for an HIV test.

Ford Hickson, Senior Research Fellow at Sigma Research, and the lead researcher on Bass Line said "Many African people in England would test for HIV if they knew where to go for a test. This simple need should be addressed as a matter of urgency. However, influencing testing in other Africans requires increasing their perception of risk from HIV infection, and increasing their understanding of the benefits of testing and the potential harm associated with not knowing their HIV status.

When it came to essential awareness about HIV, the vast majority of those completing the survey knew that: HIV is a virus that can be passed during sexual intercourse, that HIV cannot be passed through everyday contact, and that there is a medical test that can show whether someone is infected.

Jabulani Chwaula -NAHIP Programme Manager says; "The value these findings bring to HIV prevention programmes, is that, while on one hand the HIV prevention needs may be basic and primarily information-based for some, for others they are likely to be quite complex. Those who lack social power turn out to be those with the greatest need for skills and confidence to help them avoid getting or passing on HIV. Resolving this means paying attention to treatment access, stigma, discrimination, and immigration policy".

It is the position of the AHPN that an essential element of planning, funding and delivery of HIV prevention for African people in England is recognition of people's rights to access information and health services including testing for HIV.

A Department of Health spokesperson said: "We are pleased to support the Bass Line survey, which provides a valuable insight into the HIV prevention needs of African communities. Today, it's never been easier to get an HIV test with excellent access to confidential GUM and sexual health clinics. We will consider the survey findings in taking forward our national African HIV prevention programme".

The final report of Bass Line 2008-09 is available free at:
www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/go.php/reports/report2009h
www.nahip.org.uk

For more information Contact:
AHPN Information -020 7017 8910 or info@nahip.org.uk

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**Notes for Editor:

The AHPN is an alliance of African community-based organisations and their supporters working for fair policies for people living with HIV/AIDS in the UK, providing training, support, research and information. The AHPN is the only African organisation in the UK whose work is dedicated to policy, advocacy and representation at national level. Its major focus is on HIV and the sexual health of Africans in the UK.

National African HIV Prevention Programme (NAHIP)

NAHIP is a Department of Health-funded programme managed by the AHPN. It works with community-based organisations to implement prevention initiatives at national level. For more information, please visit www.nahip.org.uk

Sigma Research is a social research group specialising in the behavioural and policy aspects of HIV and sexual health. It also undertakes research and development work on aspects of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) health and wellbeing. Sigma is part of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the **University of Portsmouth**. It provides research and development services across the UK but it has its offices in London.

In the last ten years, Sigma Research has undertaken more than fifty research and development projects concerned with the impact of HIV on the sexual and social lives of a variety of populations. Projects include local, regional and national needs assessments, intervention and programme evaluations and service and policy reviews.

HIV in the UK

People living with HIV:

- More than 85,000 people are living with HIV in the UK
- Over a quarter of people with HIV in the UK are undiagnosed
- About two thirds of people living with HIV are men and a third are women
- Over half of all people living with HIV are aged between 30 and 44, but there are significant numbers both of young people and older people now living with HIV

New HIV cases in 2008:

- 7,298 new diagnoses
- The two groups most affected remain gay and bisexual men and black African heterosexuals. Three-quarters of people diagnosed were between these two groups.
- 2,760 new diagnoses among men who have sex with men
- 2,790 new diagnoses among people from black and minority ethnic communities

All figures from the Health Protection Agency report: *HIV in the United Kingdom: 2009 Report*.