

For Immediate Release

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HIV Incidence Rises in Minnesota- Minnesota AIDS Project Emphasizes Need for Prevention Education

MINNEAPOLIS, April 15, 2008 – According to statistics released today by the Minnesota Department of Health, 325 new cases of HIV were reported in Minnesota during 2007. The Minnesota AIDS Project, the leading source for HIV information and services in Minnesota, noted specific areas of concern including:

- A total of 325 new cases of HIV were reported in Minnesota. This continues a slow, steady increase of newly reported HIV infections. This level of newly reported cases within one year has not been seen since the 1990's.
- Nearly 6,000 people are known to be living with HIV disease in Minnesota with an estimated 2,500 more unaware that they are infected.
- Minority communities continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV.

New cases reported in a single year are the highest since 1995 with 30 percent of those cases occurring in people age 29 and under, pointing to a critical need for basic education on transmission risk as many young adults have adopted an erroneous view that HIV is a manageable disease. While medication advances are significant, it is essential that all Minnesotans have appropriate information to protect themselves from HIV as many people with HIV still suffer from significant side effects or struggle with finding an appropriate medication regimen.

Another key issue which also supports the need for prevention education is that as of December 31, 2007, 5,950 people are known to be living with HIV disease in Minnesota. This represents a nearly 30 percent increase from the number living with HIV in 2007 versus 2002. It is an increase of 81 percent since 1997, the year in which highly active anti-retroviral therapies (HAART regimen) were introduced and dramatically lowered the death rate from HIV. These medications have thankfully allowed many with HIV to live longer, more active lives. That also means there is a higher percentage of the population that is HIV positive and this trend will continue as long as there is not a viable vaccine for HIV.

“With more Minnesotans than ever before living with HIV, we need to work and establish a statewide commitment to basic education about this disease for all our citizens,” said Lorraine Teel, executive director of the Minnesota AIDS Project. “HIV is a 100 percent preventable disease but, to achieve that goal, every Minnesotan needs, and deserves, accurate information about HIV prevention to reduce their risk surrounding HIV. We need to get back to basics.”

Teel also noted the disparity of HIV in several specific communities, “Stigma and fear about even discussing HIV needs to be addressed directly to find solutions in order to stop these troubling trends. Unless we can speak openly in an age-appropriate manner about how HIV is, and isn’t transmitted, we will continue to see the number of new infections increase.”

Seventy-seven percent of Minnesota’s living cases of HIV are male with 72 percent of that group contracting this virus solely through male-to-male sex or through male-to-male sex and injecting drug use (dual risk). This disproportional representation demonstrates that in Minnesota, HIV continues to be a serious health threat for gay and bisexual men. Twenty-two percent of new cases of adult and adolescent HIV disease in Minnesota are among African Americans, who according to census reports represent just over four percent of the State’s population. New cases of HIV in the African born community saw an increase in 2007 though the rates over the past several years have been stable. The number of new cases reported within the Hispanic community remained relatively level to 2006, when an increase was seen.

The Minnesota AIDS Project works statewide to prevent the spread of HIV in Minnesota and reduce the challenge of living with HIV through programs, partnerships, and initiatives to engage every member of our community to take responsibility and care about HIV. For more information and to find out how you can help please visit www.mnaidsproject.org.

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