

November 20, 2015

## WORLD AIDS DAY

**Contact:**

Arlease Hall, Public Information Officer

[Arlease.Hall@flhealth.gov](mailto:Arlease.Hall@flhealth.gov)

772-370-1391



**(St. Lucie County, FL)** – Virtually everyone has heard of AIDS, the autoimmune deficiency syndrome that affects 1.2 million people in the United States. Those who are old enough to remember learned about this disease in the 1980s when little was known about it except that it was aggressive, debilitating and deadly with no known cause or cure. Those early days struck fear in most people, but because of a high level of awareness and research, AIDS is now better understood, and while there is still no cure, people with AIDS can live longer, more productive lives. This progress can be a double-edged sword. While we celebrate the advances in medicine and the increased quality of life for people living with AIDS, we hear less about AIDS yet one in eight Americans have HIV and do not know it.

December 1<sup>st</sup> is World AIDS Day, an effort to increase awareness, celebrate the great strides made in prevention, care and treatment, support people living with AIDS and honor those we have lost to AIDS. “World AIDS Day along the Treasure Coast is a week-long series of events to remind people that knowledge is power. In 2005, St. Lucie had the highest HIV infections for blacks in the state. Since Florida’s “Silence is Death Report” was published, new HIV cases have decreased by 54%. The rate of new HIV cases among blacks has declined by 65% since 2005. “This is a tremendous accomplishment and is celebrated as our success” said Clint Sperber, Health Officer and Administrator for the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie. “AIDS is not over, we want to empower people to get tested, and have people living with HIV partner with us to dispel the stigma, fear and help educate others” said Dawn Jones, Area 15 Public Health Services Manager with the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie County. “We as community leaders need to create a favorable environment for our residents, to access our HIV prevention, care and treatment services along with expanding these services throughout our county” said Kim Johnson, St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioner Chairman.

This year’s planning efforts is a collaborative partnership with the St. Lucie County HIV/AIDS Prevention Planning Group (PPG), working hand-in-hand with the Department of Health in St. Lucie County, One Treasure Coast, In the Image of Christ, St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church, Whole Family Health Center, St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners, Oxbow Eco-Center, and Butterfield’s Pharmacy, are planning a series of events from December 1<sup>st</sup> through December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

On Tuesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, a World AIDS Day Candlelight Vigil will be held at 7:00 pm St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church at 921 Orange Avenue in Ft. Pierce 34950. “This is the time for us to heal and pray together because we all can make a difference and remind our community that prevention is the first step in conquering this disease!” said Father Joseph Cuellar, Public Relations Chairperson for PPG.

On Thursday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 from 10am to 2pm, the PPG is organizing an exciting World AIDS Day Fair at Virginia College at 2810 South Federal Highway, Ft Pierce 35243. Virginia College students will show off their culinary skills! Join us, for great food win prizes and learn how important it is to people living with HIV/AIDS-to prevent this disease in our community! The event is free and open to all! Steve Hoke, the President of Care Network and the Treasure Coast Aids Consortium of Area 15 will share his views on the current status of the disease. "We have lost so many to this disease, AIDS has been forgotten and the silence today can be deadly!" said Steve.

On Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 pm bring a friend or family member to join an AIDS Awareness Hike at the Oxbow Eco-Center at 5400 NE St. James Drive, Port St. Lucie 34983. This casual 3K walk will be followed by a gathering inside the Center to build comradery with your neighbors. To end the week on Sunday December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Red Ribbon Sunday, come and pray with our faith based partners to end HIV, please call In the Image of Christ for participating churches at 772-461-7788.

For additional information on any of these events, contact the HIV Prevention Coordinator, Danielle Baron at the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie County - (772) 462-3805.

***World Aids Day is Every Day. Know Your Status, Get Tested!***

#### **About the Florida Department of Health**

The department works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

Follow us on Twitter at [@HealthyFla](https://twitter.com/HealthyFla) and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyFla). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit [www.FloridaHealth.gov](http://www.FloridaHealth.gov).

**###**