

November 30, 2011

News Release

*For Immediate Release*

### **World AIDS Day Urges Awareness and Testing**

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department joins a worldwide effort to increase awareness about HIV and AIDS on World AIDS Day, Thursday, Dec 1.

This year marks 30 years since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention first published a scientific account of what would become known as the human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that nearly 1.2 million people in the United States are living with HIV infection, with approximately 50,000 Americans becoming infected with HIV each year. Missouri has fewer cases than the national average, but public health officials agree the issue needs to be addressed.

"We encourage people to get educated, protect themselves, and get tested. Everyone should know their status," says administrator of community health and epidemiology Kendra Williams. "For some time, there has been a disproportionate increase in HIV in the African American and Hispanic populations. We must increase awareness to help reverse this trend. "

Early diagnosis is key to maintaining a healthy lifestyle with HIV. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of people that are newly infected with HIV are unaware of their status. This increases their risk of spreading the disease to others.

"People with HIV/AIDS are also at increased risk for complications from other diseases and even seasonal flu," adds Williams. "It is vital to raise awareness of the risks and the importance of vaccination and prevention strategies."

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department offers free, confidential HIV testing. For more information, call 417-864-1658 or visit [www.springfieldmo.gov/health/hiv aids.html](http://www.springfieldmo.gov/health/hiv aids.html).

Media contact: Mike Brothers, Public Information Administrator, Office: (417) 874-1205, Cell: (417) 894-9064, [mbrothers@springfieldmo.gov](mailto:mbrothers@springfieldmo.gov)