



**Office of the Mayor  
City of Los Angeles**

## **ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA**

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### **MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA LAUNCHES LARGEST COMMUNITY HIV TESTING DRIVE IN AMERICA**

*Tested for HIV, Mayor sets example for 1 million Angelenos to get tested in three years*

LOS ANGELES — Kicking off a Citywide drive to encourage 1 million Angelenos to get tested for HIV/AIDS by 2011, Mayor Villaraigosa took a rapid swab HIV test on Friday at the launch of the City's HIV Testing Initiative – the largest community-based HIV Testing drive in America.

“If we are going to eliminate HIV in Los Angeles, we need to get past the stereotypes and stigma, and make HIV testing a part of routine healthcare for all Angelenos,” Mayor Villaraigosa said. “This initiative is about moving to make HIV testing in LA easy, accessible and free for all Angelenos.”

LA County health officials estimate that 15,000 Angelenos with HIV do not know that they are carriers of the virus, a figure that could increase infection rates if routine testing is not adopted more readily among all residents.

Unlike traditional drives that target groups engaging in high-risk behavior, the LA City initiative will focus on reaching minority communities and neighborhoods underserved by AIDS counseling and testing – but who now make up the bulk of new infections in LA.

Nationally, African-American women are the fastest growing demographic group for new infections, accounting for 67 percent of new AIDS diagnoses among women, while African Americans overall are ten times as likely to get HIV than their white counterparts and three times as likely as Latinos.

In Los Angeles, African Americans are also disproportionately impacted by HIV and AIDS — representing 22 percent of the City's 21,937 AIDS cases, though only accounting for 11 percent of the population. While Latinos make up 41 percent of AIDS cases, health officials worry that Latinos typically delay getting tested, preventing early detection and treatment.

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Run by the City's AIDS Coordinator's Office and funded with seed grants and in-kind assistance from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, Gilead Sciences and test-maker OraSure, the LA Initiative will work to expand HIV testing capacity at more than 50 partner hospitals, medical groups, clinics and nonprofits throughout Los Angeles.

The Initiative will also run an extensive outreach and media campaign to encourage all City residents to include HIV testing in regular check-ups and medical visits.

"This Initiative is not about any one person taking a test, it's about 1 million Angelenos – black, white, Latino and Asian, gay and straight – together taking responsibility for the future health of our City," Mayor Villaraigosa said.

By encouraging more than a quarter of Angelenos to voluntarily get tested over the next three years, the Initiative ultimately aims to achieve the following:

- Reduce the stigma attached with HIV testing
- Determine locations where programs, services and funding could be best allocated
- Reduce new AIDS infections by helping identify and treat carriers
- Introduce rapid swab testing into a variety of venues – especially in hard-to-reach populations – to make sure that test-takers receive results and are matched with care and treatment options

"The growing number of Latinos affected by AIDS is alarming. Latinos constitute 41 percent of the known HIV/AIDS cases in Los Angeles and Latinas constitute 44 percent – we must do everything we can to reduce these dramatic numbers," said Councilmember Jose Huizar. "I am grateful for the Mayor's leadership to help reduce the number of new AIDS cases with the Citywide HIV Testing Initiative. It will also increase awareness to many of the ethnic communities that make up Los Angeles."

"There are an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 new cases of HIV infections annually in Los Angeles County alone and a disproportionate number of these cases are African Americans and Latinos. These numbers speak volumes for the need to continue our comprehensive outreach and education efforts," said Councilwoman Jan Perry. "A simple test can save a life."

"AIDS is a deadly and dangerous disease, and the only way to prevent it spreading is to talk about it and get tested," said Assemblyman Ted Lieu. "I am here today to help break down the stigma and cultural barriers to talking about AIDS and getting tested. The Asian American community must face this reality. As an Asian-American elected official it is my duty to set an example."

Working with a range of community partners, the City's testing drive will eventually include a host of programs conducted with public and private schools and colleges, local faith-based groups, and sporting events, concerts and community events.

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