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AIDS Awareness and Prevention Month, 1987

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and the disease AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) into which it can develop are a severe public health problem in the United States and elsewhere. HIV destroys the immune system and attacks the central nervous system, leading to devastating physical consequences and then to death. Because the virus has a long incubation period and the progress of the disease varies sharply from individual to individual, people can unwittingly carry and spread it for years.

AIDS afflicts thousands of Americans, and an unknown number are infected with HIV without showing any symptoms. The deadly virus is most commonly spread through sexual contact with an infected person, especially through homosexual practices; through intravenous drug use with contaminated needles; and through other transmissions of infected blood. Our country's huge and vital public health task of AIDS prevention and treatment is underway. Massive public and private efforts have already led to definite advances in research and treatment. Our understanding of AIDS remains incomplete, however, and much remains to be done before any vaccine or cure is found.

A Presidential Commission is studying the public health dangers of the HIV epidemic, including the medical, legal, ethical, social, and economic impact, and will issue a report next year, focusing on Federal, State, and local measures to protect the public from contracting the virus, to help find a cure for AIDS, and to care for those already afflicted.

Both medicine and morality teach the same lesson about prevention of AIDS. The Surgeon General has told all Americans that the best way to prevent AIDS is to abstain from sexual activity until adulthood and then to restrict sex to a monogamous, faithful relationship. This advice and the advice to say no to drugs can, of course, prevent the spread of most AIDS cases. Millions already follow this wise and timeless counsel, and our Nation is the poorer for the lost contributions of those who, in rejecting it, have suffered great pain, sorrow, and even death.

Education is crucial for awareness and prevention of AIDS. Parents have the primary responsibility to help children see the beauty, goodness, and fulfillment of chastity before marriage and fidelity within it; know the blessings of stable family life; and say yes to life and no to drugs. Educational efforts should be locally determined and consistent with parental values. Educators can develop and relay accurate health information about AIDS without mandating a specific curriculum on this subject. Parents and educators should teach children not to engage in premarital sex or to use drugs, and should place sexuality in the context of marriage, fidelity, commitment, and maturity.

Prevention of AIDS also demands responsibility from those who persist in high-risk behavior that is spreading AIDS. While many of these individuals apparently have not been convinced by educational efforts, some have begun to modify their behavior. AIDS is a fatal communicable disease of wide proportions, and all people of goodwill must realize that it is a public health problem whose prevention requires, at minimum, measures of detection, testing, and treatment now routinely taken against less dangerous communicable diseases. Our goal must be to protect the lives, the health, and the well-being of all our citizens. Public officials are entrusted with and sworn to the sacred duty of such protection. Our country needs wisdom and courage in this effort.

We also need to remember that the battle against AIDS calls for calmness, compassion, and conviction—calmness, to remember that fear is the enemy of just solutions; compassion, for all AIDS victims; and conviction, for the understanding and the willingness to combat this major public health threat effectively.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim the month of October 1987 as AIDS Awareness and Prevention Month, and I call on Americans to observe this month with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 29th day of Sept., in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan