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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DECEMBER 1ST IS WORLD AIDS DAY

OKALOOSA COUNTY - Since 1988, World AIDS Day has been celebrated on December 1st. It has become one of the most recognized international health days and it is a key opportunity to raise awareness, commemorate those who have passed on, and celebrate victories -- such as increased access to treatment and prevention services.

WHY IS AIDS AWARENESS SO IMPORTANT? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 1.2 million people in the United States are living with HIV infection. One in five of those people are unaware of their infection. To learn more about World AIDS Day, visit www.WorldAIDSCampaign.org.

Okaloosa County ranks 24th out of 67 Florida counties in the HIV case rankings (as of July '11) with a total of 142 HIV cases reported during 2011. HIV infection affects everyone, from the very young to the very old, both sexes, and all races. In Okaloosa, 68% of HIV infected persons are male, 56% are white, 31% are black, and 11% are Hispanic. The most frequently reported mode of transmission for HIV infection in Okaloosa is heterosexual contact (38%). About 39% of newly diagnosed persons in Okaloosa are forty years of age or older, and only 4% are 19 years of age or younger.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT AIDS?

- Know your HIV status. Everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 should be tested for HIV at least once. If you are at increased risk for HIV, you should be tested for HIV at least once a year.
- If you have HIV, you can get medical care, treatment, and supportive services to help you stay healthy and reduce your ability to transmit the virus to others.
- If you are pregnant and find that you have HIV, treatments are available to reduce the chance that your baby will have HIV.
- Limit your number of sex partners. The fewer partners you have, the less likely you are to encounter someone who is infected with HIV or another STD.
- Practice correct and consistent condom use. Latex condoms are highly effective at preventing transmission of HIV and some other sexually transmitted diseases. "Natural" or lambskin condoms do not provide sufficient protection against HIV infection.
- Get tested and treated for STDs and insist that your partners do too.
- Male circumcision has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV transmission from women to men during vaginal sex.
- Do not inject drugs. If you inject drugs, you should get counseling and treatment to stop or reduce your drug use. If you cannot stop injecting drugs, use clean needles and works when injecting.
- Obtain medical treatment immediately if you think you have been exposed to HIV. Sometimes, medications can prevent infection if started quickly. (This is called post-exposure prophylaxis.)
- Participate in risk reduction programs. Programs exist to help people make healthy decisions, such as negotiating condom use or discussing HIV status.

The Okaloosa County Health Department (OCHD) offers free walk-in HIV testing. Dr. Venita Morell and Dr. Jamie Glover are certified by the American Academy of HIV Medicine as HIV Specialists. They are on staff at OCHD to provide comprehensive primary care to persons living with HIV infection. The OCHD also provides assistance with HIV medications. For more information about HIV-related services at the OCHD, please visit www.HealthyOkaloosa.com.

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