



PROGRAMMING ALERT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BET PLANS COMPREHENSIVE NEWS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMMING TO SUPPORT NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY

***Network Partners with Kaiser Family Foundation to Produce Prime Time Town Hall
On HIV Testing; BET NIGHTLY NEWS Debuts Special "AIDS in the South" Series***

NEW YORK (June 17, 2003) – As part of the network's ongoing commitment to increasing public awareness of HIV/AIDS with particular emphasis on the African-American community, BET will team up with long-standing partner The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation to televise special programming in support of National HIV Testing Day June 27.

The programming will underscore the devastating and disproportionate impact the disease is having on the African-American community – which represents 12 percent of the U.S. population but more than half of all new HIV infections – while stressing the importance of testing. It is estimated that as many as one in three Americans infected with HIV today does not know it.

"Infection rates in the African-American community are soaring," said Nina Henderson Moore, Executive Vice President of News, Public Affairs and Program Acquisitions for BET. "With outreach and education, we can help bring down these devastating numbers. Through initiatives such as our award-winning Rap-It-Up Campaign conducted in partnership with the Kaiser Family Foundation, and other special programming, we will persist in our fight to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, which is now the leading cause of death for African Americans between the ages of 25 and 44."

On the eve of National HIV Testing Day on **Thursday, June 26 at 8 p.m. ET/PT**, the network will premier **BET OPEN MIC: HIV Testing Day**, an HIV/AIDS-focused installment of its critically-acclaimed prime time town hall format that will feature a frank discussion on the issue of HIV/AIDS testing. The program will be hosted by **Big Tigger** from BET's **RAP CITY: THA BASEMENT** who will be joined by a panel of medical experts and celebrities including comedian/actor **Flex Alexander** of UPN's *One on One*, who lost his brother to the disease. Also joining the panel will be Rae Lewis Thornton, a woman who has been living with the disease since 1986.

The audience will also follow Big Tigger through his recent testing experience to help demystify the process, and hear from **Magic Johnson** in a vignette stressing the importance of early detection, as well as **Juan Dixon** of the NBA's Washington Wizards, who lost his mother and father to AIDS.

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Additionally, **BET NIGHTLY NEWS** will unveil a three-part series entitled ***“Southern Blues: The Truth About AIDS In The South”*** beginning **June 25 at 11 p.m. ET/PT**. This series explores the cultural issues, taboos and regional influences behind the dramatic and disparate impact of the epidemic which is ravaging Black America’s Southland.

Eighteen of the top 25 communities hardest hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic are in Southern states. Further, a recent document written by state and community-based HIV/AIDS groups outlining the emerging crisis in the southern region, reported that 40 percent of the people estimated to be living with AIDS now reside in the South.

“Educating people about HIV/AIDS is central to preventing the spread of the disease,” said Tina Hoff, Vice President and Director of Entertainment Media Programs at the Kaiser Family Foundation. “By addressing HIV testing head on, BET is making an important contribution by helping people to learn their HIV status so they can make informed decisions.”

To reinforce the message during the week leading up to National HIV Testing Day, the network will air public service announcements encouraging people to get tested featuring Big Tigger. In addition, BET’s Rap-It-Up Campaign is co-sponsoring Big Tigger’s Celebrity Classic Weekend June 27-29, which includes “Testing For Tickets” on Friday, June 27 at Banneker Park Clubhouse across from Howard University. Individuals who take an HIV test between 2-6 p.m. ET will receive a ticket to the Celebrity All-Star Basketball Game on Saturday, June 28 at Georgetown University’s McDonough Arena. For event information, please call (202) 232-8552.

Following is a synopsis of BET’s comprehensive coverage of National HIV Testing Day:

Thursday, June 25 - 27

11:30 p.m. ET/PT

“Southern Blues: The Truth About AIDS In The South”

In partnership with the Kaiser Family Foundation, **BET NIGHTLY NEWS** will produce a three-part series exploring the cultural issues, taboos and regional influences behind the dramatic and disparate impact HIV/AIDS is having on Black America’s Southland. Packages will include a focus on HIV/AIDS issues among Black heterosexual women; the limited pool of HIV/AIDS healthcare providers in the South; and the AIDS debate within the Black church.

Thursday, June 26

8:00 p.m. ET/PT

BET Open Mic: HIV National Testing Day

On the eve of National HIV Testing Day, a panel of celebrities, including **Flex Alexander** from UPN’s *One on One*, and medical experts engage in frank conversation moderated by **Big Tigger**, host of BET’s *RAP CITY: THA BASEMENT*. The show’s participants will discuss pre-produced packages about individual HIV testing experiences, including host Big Tigger’s personal experience, as well as a segment on people living with AIDS.

Since 1998, BET and the Kaiser Foundation have partnered to educate African-American youth on sexual health issues, reaching millions of young viewers and generating nearly half a million calls to the campaign’s toll-free information and referral line (1-866-RAPITUP). **“Rap It Up,”** an award-winning HIV/AIDS awareness campaign launched in 2000, includes special on-air programming, targeted public service announcements (PSAs) and extensive print, online (www.rap-it-up.com) and referral resources. Callers to the toll-free line can also request an informational booklet on sexual health. BET, a subsidiary of Viacom, is the nation’s leading 24-hour television network providing quality entertainment, news and public affairs programming for the African-American audience. BET reaches more than 75 million households according to Nielsen media research.