

TIMELINE

25 Milestones in Our Time with AIDS

1981

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention publishes its first notice of a rare, fatal pneumonia found in five previously healthy gay men in Los Angeles. Originally called GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency) or “gay cancer,” the next year CDC would describe the condition as an immune disorder called AIDS, listing male homosexuality, injection drug use, Haitian origin and hemophilia as “identified risk factors.”

1983

- CDC adds female sex partners of men with AIDS as a fifth group at risk, citing a Black and a Latina woman who developed the condition after having sex with men using injection drugs.

1984

- Scientists identify the virus that causes AIDS and name it HIV, for human immunodeficiency virus.

1987

- FDA approves AZT as the first drug for AIDS. Priced at as much as \$10,000 for a year’s supply, it’s one of the most expensive meds ever marketed. The recommended dosage of a pill every four hours, around the clock, is later found to be highly toxic.
- President Reagan makes his first public speech about AIDS—he hadn’t mentioned the word at all before 1986.

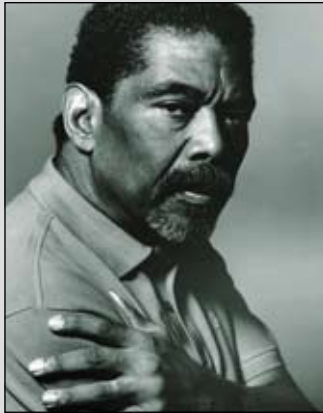
- Black AIDS activism explodes, with the founding of National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS and the National Minority AIDS Council. The National Task Force on AIDS Prevention would hold its first meeting the following year.

1988

- CDC announces that as of December 1988, African Americans account for half of all AIDS cases ever reported among women.

1989

■ Dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey dies from AIDS at age 58. While Rock Hudson and other celebrities had died from AIDS, Ailey's was the first high-profile African American death.



is still considered the watershed moment of the Black epidemic, when African Americans began talking openly about AIDS.

■ Red Ribbon is introduced as an AIDS awareness symbol during the Tony Awards.

1993

■ Wimbledon champ and tennis Hall of Famer Arthur Ashe dies from AIDS at age 49. More than 15,000 African Americans died from AIDS that year, rising toward a 1995 peak of nearly 20,000 deaths in a single year.



■ Denzel Washington stars in the AIDS movie *Philadelphia*, for which Tom Hanks wins Best Actor Oscar.

■ FDA approves the sale of “female condoms” in the U.S. Today, researchers continue searching for female-controlled forms of HIV prevention to empower women in protecting themselves.

1994

■ HIV-positive activist Rae Lewis-Thornton is featured on the cover of *Essence*. AIDS hotlines report a large spike in calls from women who connect with Lewis-Thornton's story of a successful Black woman who didn't fit any AIDS stereotypes but nevertheless got infected.

1995

■ Hip-hop legend Eric “Eazy-E” Wright announces he has AIDS just weeks before

1990

■ Ryan White, an Indiana teen who contracted HIV as a hemophiliac, dies at 18. White's fight against his school's refusal to allow him to attend drew celebrity sponsors, including Michael Jackson. Congress names the bill creating today's system for funding AIDS care and treatment after White.

■ Kenyan President Daniel Moi ignites a firestorm of controversy by touting an AIDS “cure” developed by Kenyan scientists and marketed as Kemron. The declaration stoked conspiracy theories in Black neighborhoods that U.S. government had a cure for AIDS but was withholding it. No follow-up studies found Kemron to work.

1991

■ Los Angeles Lakers star Earvin “Magic” Johnson announces he has tested HIV-positive, warning “it could happen to anybody” and retiring from basketball. His announcement



dying at age 31. If Magic's announcement grabbed Black America's attention, the rap star's sudden death finally jolted the hip-hop world into discussing AIDS.



■ FDA approves the first protease inhibitor drugs, which would be credited with suddenly beating back AIDS deaths—for those with access to the medicine. The following year would be the first year in which more Blacks died from AIDS than whites. Today Blacks are eight times more likely than whites to die from AIDS once diagnosed with HIV.

1996

■ Media celebrates the “end of AIDS,” with cover stories in *New York Times Magazine* and *Newsweek*, among others.

1997

■ Nushawn Williams is accused of deliberately exposing several white women in upstate New York to HIV and is jailed, sparking a media frenzy. It was never proven that any of the women contracted HIV from Williams.

1998

■ Congressional Black Caucus pushes Minority AIDS Initiative through Congress, creating a special stream of federal funding for addressing HIV/AIDS in communities of color.

■ Clinton administration acknowledges several previous government studies showing needle exchange stops the spread of

HIV and encourages addiction treatment, but refuses to lift ban on federal funding for such programs. Half of all Black female AIDS cases through 2003 were attributed either to injecting drugs or sex with someone using injection drugs.

2000

■ CDC announces Black and Latino men for the first time represent the majority of new AIDS cases among gay and bisexual men. By 2005, one CDC study would estimate infection rates among Black gay and bisexual men in some cities to be as high as 46 percent.

2005

■ CDC announces that African Americans account for half of all people now living with HIV/AIDS in America—and nearly half of all new infections.

2006

■ The AIDS epidemic turns 25 years old. No vaccine or cure exists, and none is predicted for the foreseeable future.