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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**HEALTH DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES HIV OUTREACH CAMPAIGN
ENCOURAGING EVERYONE TO GET TESTED**

It is estimated that a thousand Westchester residents are infected with the HIV virus and don't know it. Chances are these people have never been tested for HIV because they do not believe they have a reason to do so. That's why the Health Department is launching a highly visible marketing campaign that uses eye-catching bus posters, postcards, newspaper ads, extensive community outreach efforts and assorted incentive items to encourage all residents to get tested.

"HIV infection is a significant public health issue in Westchester County," said Dr. Lipsman. "Outside of New York City, Westchester County has the most individuals living with HIV and AIDS in New York State. It is my hope that people will see our campaign materials out in their communities and then pick up the phone to learn where they can go for testing," he added.

The Health Department's marketing campaign consists of five different ad designs with each advertisement carrying the tagline "Everyone Has a Reason to Get an HIV Test." The graphical elements of the campaign were created for the Health Department by Better World Advertising, a social marketing company in San Francisco that has produced many national HIV-related campaigns.

All components of the campaign encourage people to call the Westchester County Department of Health's new 24-hour HIV Information Line (914-995-9595) for more information about HIV testing. HIV

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testing through the Department of Health and its partnering agencies is free and is offered at various locations throughout the County. Individuals can be tested using their names (confidential testing) or without giving their names (anonymous testing).

The Health Department is undertaking an ambitious, multi-layered approach to get the word out that rapid HIV testing is simple, free and available to all residents. Bus posters, carrying the campaign message, "Everyone Has a Reason to Get an HIV Test," are being placed inside each of the County's 400 Beeline buses. In total, 2,000 interior bus posters are being produced, allowing for each design to be placed in every bus for a set period of time before rotating to the next one. Residents will begin to see the posters in Beeline buses during the next few weeks.

The campaign's impact will be enhanced by the distribution of 40,000 companion postcards that will be hand delivered to numerous sites throughout the County for distribution to the public. Three community workers, hired by the Health Department for the summer, will conduct door-to-door outreach to community-based organizations, retail establishments (such as hair salons, bodegas, delis, restaurants), libraries and faith-based organizations to distribute a supply of postcards printed with the campaign's theme and information about testing sites funded through this initiative.

To round out the effort, print advertisements will be placed in various print media publications throughout the county and promotional give-away items imprinted with the campaign tagline and contact information will be distributed to residents at upcoming community events.

In addition to Health Department District Office clinics in Yonkers, White Plains and New Rochelle, the Health Department has contracted with two community healthcare partners to expand access to rapid HIV testing in Westchester County. The Westchester Medical Center and the Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center have each received \$15,000 for the period of June 1, 2007 through May 31, 2008 to offer rapid HIV testing at multiple community sites. Through this expanded effort, an estimated 3,000 individuals are expected to receive rapid HIV testing.

The Health Department is also hiring a temporary worker for 26 weeks who will conduct rapid HIV testing at its district offices and provide community-based rapid HIV testing at health fairs, community centers and cultural events. It is anticipated that an additional 225 residents will receive rapid HIV testing at Health Department sites as a result of this expanded staffing.

"While many people are aware of the advances that have been made in HIV and AIDS treatment, few know that the same is true for HIV testing, which is now quick, easy and painless," said Dr. Lipsman. "Gone

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are the days when HIV testing required having blood drawn and then returning to the doctors' office a week or two later to get results. That's because a relatively new rapid HIV test is now available that is done with an oral swab and yields results in just 20 minutes," he added.

From 1982, when the Health Department began keeping track of AIDS cases, through 2004, there have been over 6,000 AIDS cases reported in Westchester County residents. It is estimated that 4,200 residents are currently infected with HIV and that 1,000 are unaware of their positive status. That being the case, those who are unaware of their HIV infection may engage in risky behaviors putting others at risk for acquiring the virus. The Health Department's current outreach effort is aimed at getting these unknowing individuals to inquire about their HIV status and seek out testing.

Two of the five Health Department campaign designs are attached. All of the designs can be viewed online at the Health Department's website, www.westchestergov.com/health. Media may request original copies of the designs for print or broadcast display by contacting the Public Health Information and Communications Division of the Health Department at (914) 813-5013.

