



Media Release

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Contact: Connie Chavez

713-566-6430 or 713-566-4370

HCHD Cares for Katrina's HIV/AIDS Population

Keeping evacuees healthy and alive are top priorities

The Harris County Hospital District's (HCHD) Thomas Street Health Center is helping Katrina evacuees who are in need of medical care and prescriptions for HIV/AIDS.

The freestanding HIV/AIDS treatment facility, which provides medical and psychological services to Harris County residents diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, is now offering its services to hurricane victims—many who were left without a care provider, medicine or resources.

"We are in crisis response mode right now. That means providing help to those who need it, regardless of where they live," said Michael Dean, acting director at Thomas Street. "Our priority is making sure evacuees who are HIV-positive get the care they need to remain healthy and alive."

Thomas Street is providing the saliva-based Oraquick™ HIV test to confirm those seeking assistance are HIV-positive. Test results are available within minutes, lessening the amount of time it will take for patients to obtain services like medical exams, prescription refills and counseling.

"We are meeting with evacuees individually to evaluate their needs and ensure they receive the help they need as soon as possible," said Jeff Benavides, HIV educator at Thomas Street. "Fortunately, the hospital district has resources and procedures in place that allow us to react quickly during an emergency like this where people's lives are at stake."

Evacuees who are HIV/AIDS patients require care beyond what was provided at HCHD's Astrodome Health Clinic, which was more of an emergency care setting. They require a continuum of care, follow-up visits and long-term maintenance, according to Benavides.

Thomas Street has received many calls from Katrina evacuees the past few days—many ran out or are close to finishing their medications, some have established residency in Houston and are looking for a medical home and others simply want to know where they can receive immediate care.

"The Hospital District is doing what it does best, which is responding during emergencies when our community needs us," Dean said. "We broadened our mission to care for Katrina's victims at the Astrodome, in our hospitals and health centers, and in homeless shelters around the city. There aren't many organizations that can do that."

In addition to Thomas Street Health Center, the Harris County Hospital District operates the temporary Astrodome Health Clinic, Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 11 community health centers, a dental center, seven school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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