

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 13, 2016

Contact: Karrey Britt
Communications Coordinator
Office: (785) 856-7362

Health Department to host displays of The AIDS Memorial Quilt, kickoff event

(Lawrence, KS) – Six sections of the world-renowned AIDS Memorial Quilt will be on display in June in Lawrence. The Quilt, a 54-ton handmade tapestry that stands as a memorial to more than 94,000 individuals who have died from AIDS, was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and remains the largest community art project in the world.

For the first time in nearly a decade, the Quilt will be on view in Lawrence. The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department is hosting the displays and will have a kickoff event at 6 p.m. June 2 at the Lied Center of Kansas, 1600 Stewart Drive.

The event will include:

- **6-6:30 p.m.** — Keynote speaker will be Bret Turner, who has been living with HIV for 25 years and is an education outreach volunteer with Positive Connections, an HIV/AIDS service organization in Topeka. There will be a panel discussion about working with patients affected by HIV/AIDS. Panelists include: Kathleen Link and Debbie Guilbault, of Positive Connections; Sue McDanel and Michael Showalter, of the Health Department; and Jenny McKee, of Watkins Health Services at the University of Kansas.
- **6:30-7:30 p.m.** — Viewing of “The Last One: Unfolding the AIDS Memorial Quilt,” a documentary that examines how stigma and discrimination exacerbated a disease that has claimed the lives of 30 million people and currently affects 36 million men, women and children around the world.
- **7:30-8 p.m.** — Viewing of The AIDS Memorial Quilt and refreshments.

Four sections of the Quilt will be on view June 2 through June 30 at the Lied Center while another two will be at Lawrence Public Library, 707 Vermont St. Each 12-foot-by-12-foot section consists of eight individual panels sewn together. Every panel memorializes the life of a person lost to AIDS. Those that will be on display in Lawrence will represent lives lost in Kansas and nearby states.

“We are thrilled to be able to share The AIDS Memorial Quilt with our community,” said Showalter, Health Promotion Specialist and HIV Prevention Specialist at the Health Department. “These handmade panels tell the stories of individuals who have lost their lives to AIDS. We wanted to bring you their stories with the hope of inspiring compassion as well as responsibility.”

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that weakens the immune system, gradually destroying the body’s ability to fight infections and certain cancers. AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is the final stage of HIV infection that occurs when your immune system is very badly damaged and becomes vulnerable to infections. Not everyone who has HIV develops AIDS. HIV is spread most often through unprotected sex, blood-contaminated needles or syringes shared by HIV-positive drug abusers, infected blood or blood products, and from HIV-positive women to their babies at birth or through breastfeeding.



In the United States, about 1 million people are living with HIV and one in eight of those are unaware of their HIV status. In Douglas County, nearly 68 percent of adults report they've never had an HIV test.

The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department offers HIV counseling and testing in its clinic at 200 Maine St. To make an appointment, call (785) 843-0721. The Health Department also will offer education and free HIV testing in the community throughout the month of June.

Testing will be:

- **Friday, June 17** — 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Lawrence Public Library, 707 Vermont St.
- **Friday, June 24** — 4-7 p.m., Lawrence Public Library.
- **Monday, June 27, which is National HIV Testing Day** — 10 a.m.-noon, Lawrence Community Shelter, 3701 Franklin Park Circle; 1-3 p.m., Just Food, 1000 E. 11th St.; 5-8 p.m., Lawrence Public Library.

“Knowing your HIV status is critical. It’s important to get tested early to help prevent spread of the virus and to begin treatment as soon as possible,” Showalter said. “If you have HIV, getting medical care and taking prescribed medication regularly helps you live a longer, healthier life and also lowers the chances of passing HIV on to others.”

In December 2013, there were an estimated 3,370 people in Kansas living with HIV/AIDS, according to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. Of them, about 1,600 (51 percent) had an AIDS diagnosis.