World AIDS Day

**World AIDS Day**, observed on 1 December every year, is dedicated to raising awareness of the AIDS [pandemic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS_pandemic) caused by the spread of HIV infection. Government and health officials observe the day, often with speeches or forums on the AIDS topics. Since 1995, the President of the United States has made an official [proclamation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_observances_in_the_United_States_by_presidential_proclamation) on World AIDS Day. Governments of other nations have followed suit and issued similar announcements.

AIDS has killed more than 25 million people between 1981 and 2007,[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-1) and an estimated 33.2 million people worldwide live with HIV as of 2007,[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-2) making it one of the most destructive epidemics in recorded history. Despite recent, improved access to antiretroviral treatment and care in many regions of the world, the AIDS epidemic claimed an estimated 2 million lives in 2007,[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-3) of which about 270,000 were children

History

Russian stamp, 1993

World AIDS Day was first conceived in August 1987 by James W. Bunn and Thomas Netter, two public information officers for the Global Programme on AIDS at the [World Health Organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Health_Organization) in Geneva, Switzerland.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-5)[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-6) Bunn and Netter took their idea to Dr. Jonathan Mann, Director of the Global Programme on AIDS (now known as [UNAIDS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNAIDS)). Dr. Mann liked the concept, approved it, and agreed with the recommendation that the first observance of World AIDS Day should be 1 December 1988.

Bunn, a broadcast journalist on a leave-of-absence from his reporting duties at KPIX-TV in San Francisco, recommended the date of 1 December believing it would maximize coverage by western news media. Since 1988 was an election year in the U.S., Bunn suggested that media outlets would be weary of their post-election coverage and eager to find a fresh story to cover. Bunn and Netter determined that 1 December was long enough after the election and soon enough before the Christmas holidays that it was, in effect, a dead spot in the news calendar and thus perfect timing for World AIDS Day.

On 18 June 1986 KPIX'S “AIDS Lifeline" (a community education project initiated by Bunn and KPIX Special Projects Producer Nancy Saslow) was honored with a Presidential Citation for Private Sector Initiatives presented by President Ronald Reagan. Because of his role in "AIDS Lifeline" Bunn was asked by Dr. Mann, on behalf of the U.S. government, to take a two-year leave-of-absence to join Dr. Mann, an epidemiologist for the Centers for Disease Control, and assist in the creation of the Global Programme on AIDS for the United Nations' World Health Organization. Mr. Bunn accepted and was named the first Public Information Officer for the Global Programme on AIDS. Bunn and Netter conceived, designed, and implemented the inaugural World AIDS Day observance – now the longest-running disease awareness and prevention initiative of its kind in the history of public health.

The [Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_United_Nations_Programme_on_HIV/AIDS) (UNAIDS) became operational in 1996, and it took over the planning and promotion of World AIDS Day.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-Speicher-7) Rather than focus on a single day, UNAIDS created the World AIDS Campaign in 1997 to focus on year-round communications, prevention and education.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-Speicher-7)[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-Soest-8)

In its first two years, the theme of World AIDS Day focused on children and young people. These themes were strongly criticized at the time for ignoring the fact that people of all ages may become infected with HIV and suffer from AIDS.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-Speicher-7) But the themes drew attention to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, helped alleviate some of the stigma surrounding the disease, and helped boost recognition of the problem as a family disease.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-Speicher-7)

In 2004, the World AIDS Campaign became an independent organization.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-Speicher-7)[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-Soest-8)[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-9)

Each year, Popes [John Paul II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Paul_II) and [Benedict XVI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benedict_XVI) have released a greeting message for patients and doctors on World AIDS Day.[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-10)[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-11)[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-12)[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-13)[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-14)[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-15)

In 2007, the [White House](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House) began marking World AIDS Day with the iconic display of a 28-foot AIDS Ribbon on the building's North Portico. [[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_AIDS_Day#cite_note-16) The display, now an annual tradition, quickly garnered attention, as it was the first banner, sign or symbol to prominently hang from the White House since the [Abraham Lincoln](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln) administration.

