

### **Youth HIV/AIDS Forum on Tap**

*by Amy Wooten*

*2007-11-07*

Those concerned about the rising rates of HIV/AIDS infection among Illinois teens will soon convene to confront the issue.

On Nov. 9, a forum organized by The Children's Place Association will take place in order to address the problem affecting Illinois adolescents. At the forum, teens from Broadway Youth Center will share their stories and local experts will reveal new statistics and facts.

Among those facts is that up to 50 percent of new infection rates in the state are among those ages 13-24. However, the high rates of infection aren't the only concern that will be discussed. Illinois continues to have a statute on its books that few, in any, states have in place: The law requires school principals to be notified if a student tests positive.

The association's Cathy Krieger is upset by new data that indicates a severe problem in Illinois. "Why isn't it 0 percent?" she asked. Krieger added that new data gives her reason to believe that rates of infection among adolescents are even higher than what state and city public health departments previously thought.

The notification statute was passed in 1987, and modified in 1988, at what association spokesman David Ormsby calls "the height of the ignorance of HIV/AIDS." It was a time when people were scared, and didn't know the modes of transmission.

"In this day and age, a piece of legislation like this would not pass," he added.

Illinois' notification policy creates a barrier, Krieger said. "If people know that, they are not going to get tested," she continued. She feels the policy needs to be changed in order to make progress and tackle the alarming rates of infection among Illinois teens.

Ormsby added that under the statute, all authorized to know a child's HIV-positive status include the principal, school nurse and teacher, making it possible for word to spread, potentially causing harm to the student.

State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, will participate in the forum because she was "alarmed" when the notification statute was brought to her attention. She called it "culturally insensitive." Feigenholtz told Windy City Times that she is working with HIV/AIDS advocates to repeal the statute.

Tackling the statute is just one piece of the puzzle, however. Ormsby told Windy City Times that the continued lack of attention to teens when it comes to HIV/AIDS needs to stop. "They are an overlooked group," he said.

There are many issues and obstacles that teens face, Krieger said, such as youth concerned about their privacy while under their parent's insurance; teens who are without a home and are not under state care; and more.

“We need a comprehensive targeted approach to that age group,” Feigenholtz said. “We need an accelerated road map to get where we want to get with youth.”

The Children’s Place Association-sponsored forum—which will take place Fri., Nov. 9 at the Chicago InterContinental Hotel, 505 N. Michigan, at 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.—will feature medical experts, academics, politicians and HIV/AIDS-infected youth. See [www.childrens-place.org](http://www.childrens-place.org).