

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **GOVERNOR SIGNS PROCLAMATION COMMENDING MISS AMERICA; HIGHLIGHTS STATE'S EFFORTS TO PREVENT SPREAD OF AIDS**

Gov. Christie Whitman today highlighted New Jersey's efforts to curtail the spread of AIDS and HIV when she signed a proclamation commending reigning Miss America, Kate Shindle, for her achievements and her activities. Ms. Shindle's platform is to educate people about AIDS and HIV prevention.

"Kate Shindle has dedicated her year as Miss America to speaking about AIDS and HIV prevention," Gov. Whitman said. "Every death from this preventable disease affects not only the victim but his or her family, friends, and countless others."

"We want to help those with HIV infection and we want to prevent it, too," the Governor said. "New Jersey is aggressive in both treatment and prevention."

According to Gov. Whitman, the number of pregnant women with HIV has declined steadily since 1988, and preliminary data from the past couple of years suggests this promising trend will continue.

"We also saw AIDS-related deaths fall 29 percent from 1995," Gov. Whitman said. "But we still suffered more than 2,000 deaths in 1996. We must continue to look for a cure, to improve treatment and access to treatment, and, above all, to stress prevention."

The following are some of the actions the State has taken in the area of AIDS and HIV treatment and prevention:

- Establishment of an AIDS drug distribution program which now includes 49 drugs, including all four FDA-approved protease inhibitors. Well over half of the 2,600 persons served by this program last year received protease inhibitors.
- Passage of legislation requiring doctors to counsel pregnant woman about the advantages of HIV testing.
- Encouragement of pregnant women infected with HIV to take AZT, which has been shown to reduce the risk of transmission to unborn children.
- Conducting through the Department of Health a World AIDS Day of Learning for New Jersey youth each year. Peer leaders from high schools around the state gather to learn more about HIV and AIDS prevention, and then bring the message back to their fellow students.
- Operation of a mobile health van with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey to test and counsel high- risk young people in Essex County.
- Encouraging more people to test for HIV by converting HIV testing from blood analysis to the non-invasive OraSure HIV Testing System. This conversion has sparked a 20 percent increase in HIV testing.