Most interestingly, there's even a HIV test sold in drug stores now. Remember when the two week wait for results felt like two years. Basically, HIV/AIDS is no longer a death sentence.

By RHONDA CROWDER
Staff reporter

I was in the 8th grade when I first began to hear about the infection known as HIV/AIDS. I remember seeing a movie, in the media center atHarryE.DavisIntermediateSchool, where a British woman had AIDS and her body continuously shook.

Contracting this disease seemed scary to say the least.

As teenagers at the onset of puberty, with raging hormones, we were warned to either remain abstinent or use a condom to protect ourselves. Don't think too many of us – members of the first generation to not know what it is like to freely engage in casual sex without worrying about contracting a deadly disease – listened.

I guess we didn't think it would happen to us.

Back then, not much was known about the disease but people started to drop like flies. First, you heard about them being diagnosed. Just a few months later, they were dead. And, with the deaths of famed actor Rock Hudson and pianist Liberace, many considered it to be exclusive to gay, White males.

Then, we lost Arthur Ashe, who contracted AIDS through a blood transfusion. If I remember correctly, that's when panic started to set in. Fast forward a few years to the death of rapper Eric "Eazy E" Wright, my generation finally paused. What? Eazy? That could be me, we thought.

Of course, the Ervin Magic Johnson announcement shocked the world.

At that point, the message became clear. Anyone, who is sexually active, can contract this disease. It's not exclusive to certain populations. And, since its onset, millions of men, woman, and child around this globe have died. But, now, as we approach World AIDS Day, Dec. 1, the message coming out of the HIV/AIDS community highly suggests the end is near.

This past July, I had the honor of covering the 2012 International AIDS Conference inWashington,D.C.During the weeklong gathering, plenary sessions and workshops focused on "Turning the Tide Together" and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton discussed the goal of getting to an "AIDS free generation."

It was stated several times that we are at the beginning of the end.

Looking through my conference bag of leaflets, pamphlets, and booklets, I came across a publication by the Black AIDS Institute, entitled, “Exit Strategy: Ending the AIDS Epidemic in Black America,” while the theme around the Cleveland Department of Public Health’s World AIDS Day events is “Getting to Zero …” zero new infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths further reinforced this notion.

So, after nearly 30 years of lost lives and research, have we really reached that point?

From what I’ve been exposed to as a result of attended the conference, I can say yes.

Advances in medicine are allowing people living with HIV/AIDS to not only manage the disease, they are able to live longer productive lives. Breakthroughs in research are beginning to present prevention treatments including Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PreP),a new HIV prevention method in which people who do not have HIV take a daily pill to reduce their risk of becoming infected.

We’ve come a long away….

Remember the little girl, Hydeia Broadbent, born with HIV? Now 28, she’s grown into a beautiful young lady and sought after HIV/AIDS activist. She wasn’t expected to live beyond age 5. Had she been born inWashington,D.C., within the last two years, doctors could’ve have insolated the disease to her mother – never allowing it to enter her bloodstream. Yes, today, fewer babies are born with HIV/AIDS.

Most interestingly, there’s even a HIV test sold in drug stores now. Remember when the two week wait for results felt like two years. Basically, HIV/AIDS is no longer a death sentence.

But, there’s still much work to be done. Doctors are still searching for a cure. Too many people are still going undiagnosed. Discrimination still exists. But, if we continue to remember the lives lost, become inform, practice safe sex, and work together, we can put an end this epidemic once and for all.