



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Your Online Source for Credible Health Information

Press Release

For immediate release: September 23, 2010

Contact: NCHHSTPMediaTeam@cdc.gov (mailto:NCHHSTPMediaTeam@cdc.gov)

(404) 639-8895

1 in 5 men who have sex with men in 21 U.S. cities has HIV; nearly half unaware

Study highlights urgent HIV prevention needs for men who have sex with men, especially young men and men of color

Approximately one in five (19 percent) men who have sex with men (MSM) in a study of 21 major U.S. cities is infected with HIV, and nearly half (44 percent) of those men are unaware of their infection, according to a new analysis from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In the study, young MSM and MSM of color were least likely to know their HIV status. The findings were published today in CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

"This study's message is clear: HIV exacts a devastating toll on men who have sex with men in America's major cities, and yet far too many of those who are infected don't know it," said Kevin Fenton, M.D., director of CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. "We need to increase access to HIV testing so that more MSM know their status, and we all must bring new energy, new approaches, and new champions to the fight against HIV among men who have sex with men."

The study's results bolster key themes in the President's National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States. The recently released strategy states that "the United States cannot reduce the number of HIV infections nationally without better addressing HIV among gay and bisexual men," and MSM are listed among a few priority populations to focus HIV prevention efforts. The President's strategy also sets targets for reducing the number of individuals living with HIV who are unaware of their HIV status.

The CDC study tested 8,153 MSM in 21 cities participating in the 2008 National HIV Behavioral Surveillance System (NHBS), and examined HIV prevalence and awareness of HIV status among this group. NHBS monitors HIV testing, risk behaviors, and access to prevention services among at-risk populations in cities with high numbers of persons living with AIDS.

While MSM of all races and ethnicities were severely affected, black MSM were particularly impacted: 28 percent of black MSM were HIV-infected, compared to 18 percent of Hispanic and 16 percent of white MSM.

The study also found a strong link between socioeconomic status and HIV among MSM: prevalence increased as education and income decreased, and awareness of HIV status was higher among MSM with greater education and income. These findings echo similar disparities found in recent NHBS research among heterosexuals.

Low awareness of HIV infection a major concern, particularly for younger men

The study provided additional insight into the populations of MSM most in need of HIV testing and prevention:

- Among racial/ethnic groups, black MSM with HIV were least likely to be aware of their infection (59 percent unaware, vs. 46 percent for Hispanic MSM and 26 percent for white MSM).
- While young MSM (under age 30) had lower HIV prevalence than older men, they were far more likely to be unaware of their HIV infection. Among MSM aged 18-29 who had HIV, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) were unaware, versus 37 percent for men age 30 and older.
- Among young MSM, young MSM of color were less likely than whites to know they were HIV-infected. Among HIV-infected black MSM under age 30, 71 percent were unaware of their infection; among HIV-infected Hispanic MSM under age 30, 63 percent were unaware. This compares to 40 percent of HIV-infected white MSM under age 30.

CDC officials note that low awareness of HIV status among young MSM likely reflects several factors: they may have been infected more recently, may underestimate their personal risk, may have had fewer opportunities to get tested, or may believe that advances in HIV treatment minimize the threat of HIV. For young MSM of color, discrimination and socioeconomic factors – such as poverty, homophobia, stigma, and limited health-care access – may be especially acute and pose particular challenges.

"For young men who have sex with men – including young men of color who are least likely to know they may be infected – the future is truly on the line," said Jonathan Mermin, M.D., director of CDC's Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention. "It is critical that we reach these young men early in their lives with HIV prevention and testing services and continue to make these vital services available as they become older."

CDC estimates that the majority of new sexually transmitted infections are transmitted by individuals who are unaware of their infection, and studies show that once people learn they are HIV-infected, most take steps to protect their partners. Therefore, because undiagnosed infection likely plays a major role in HIV transmission, reaching younger MSM with regular HIV testing is critical.

CDC recommends that MSM of all ages get tested for HIV at least annually, or more often (every three to six months) if they are at increased risk (e.g., those with multiple or anonymous sex partners, or who use drugs during sex). Notably, only 45 percent of HIV-infected MSM who were unaware of their infection had been tested in the past year, underscoring the importance of more frequent testing among those at highest risk.

While HIV prevention for MSM remains a top CDC priority, agency officials note that a renewed national commitment to HIV prevention is needed to reduce the toll of HIV on MSM and increase access to prevention.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/hiv (<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv>) or www.actagainstaids.org (<http://www.actagainstaids.org>).

###

[U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES](http://www.hhs.gov/) (<http://www.hhs.gov/>)

Page last updated: September 22, 2010

Content source: National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1600 Clifton Rd. Atlanta, GA
30333, USA
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) TTY: (888) 232-6348, 24 Hours/Every Day -
cdcinfo@cdc.gov

