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CDC Estimates Half of New HIV Infections Occur Among Black Americans

High-risk sexual behavior continues to be the primary driver.

Blacks have long shouldered a disproportionate burden of the U.S. HIV/AIDS epidemic. Recent figures indicate how great that burden continues to be.

CDC researchers analyzed data on new HIV diagnoses from 2005 through 2008 in 37 states that had longstanding HIV surveillance systems. Although blacks made up only 14% of the population in these states, they accounted for half of the new HIV diagnoses made. Forty-five percent of the men with new diagnoses were black, as were 66% of the women. In 2008, the rates of new diagnoses among black men and women were 8 and 19 times higher than the rates among white men and women and 2 and 4 times higher than the rates among Hispanic men and women. Among black men, the most common reported modes of HIV acquisition were male-to-male sex (61%) and high-risk heterosexual contact (23%); the vast majority of black women with new diagnoses (85%) attributed their infection to heterosexual contact. During the reporting period, the rate of HIV diagnoses rose every year among black men but remained relatively stable among black women and other racial/ethnic groups.

A detailed analysis of data from Wisconsin indicates that most of the increase in diagnoses among black men probably represents new infections, rather than increased detection of prevalent infections. Investigators compared diagnoses among young black men from 1999 through 2001 with diagnoses from 2006 through 2008, following the implementation of a new "social networks" testing strategy directed at black and Hispanic men who have sex with men. They observed a rise in HIV diagnoses that started before the targeted testing program began and that was preceded by a rise in syphilis diagnoses; cases were concentrated among the youngest group tested.

Comment: The states contributing data to the first study did not include several high-prevalence zones, including California and the District of Columbia; thus, the actual rates of new infections among blacks may be even higher than estimated here. Together, these two studies deliver a stark message about the ongoing need for targeted risk reduction among blacks in the U.S.

— [Abigail Zuger, MD](http://aids-clinical-care.jwatch.org/misc/board_about.dtl#aZuger) (Link to: http://aids-clinical-care.jwatch.org/misc/board_about.dtl#aZuger)

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Increase in newly diagnosed HIV infections among young black men who have sex with men — Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, 1999–2008. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2011 Feb

4; 60:99. (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6004a3.htm> (Link to: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6004a3.htm>))

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