



HIV and AIDS among African American Youth

African American youth continue to be one of the groups most severely affected by HIV infection in the United States. In fact, black youth represent half of all new HIV infections among young people aged 13 to 29. These numbers underscore the need to reach a new generation with effective HIV prevention programs and messages. We simply cannot afford to lose the next generation to this potentially deadly, but preventable disease.

A Snapshot

- ▶ While African Americans represent approximately 14 percent of the U.S. population, blacks account for almost half of the more than one million people estimated to be living with HIV in the United States, and of new HIV infections each year.
- ▶ African American youth are particularly affected. In fact, of the nearly 25,000 infections estimated to occur each year among African Americans, more than one-third (38 percent) are among young people aged 13 to 29.
- ▶ Young African American men, particularly gay and bisexual men, as well as African American heterosexual women are severely impacted.
- ▶ Among those aged 13 to 29, the rates of infection among young black men are higher than among any other race/ethnicity.
 - The rate of new infections among young black males aged 13 to 29 is seven times as high as that of young white males and three times as high as that of young Hispanic males.
 - Young black gay/bisexual men are especially hard-hit, comprising more than three-quarters of new infections among young black men and accounting for more infections than any other racial/ethnic group of men who have sex with men (MSM).¹
 - HIV incidence among young black MSM is roughly twice that of young white MSM and young Hispanic MSM in the 13 to 29-year-old age group.
 - In a study of 21 major U.S. cities in 2008, 21 percent of black MSM under 30 were HIV-infected and more than 70 percent of those infected were unaware.
- ▶ Young black women are far more affected by HIV than young women of other races.
 - The rate of new infections among young black females aged 13 to 29 is 11 times as high as that of young white females and four times that of young Hispanic females.
 - The vast majority of young black women with HIV are infected through heterosexual contact.
- ▶ Many African American youth are diagnosed late in the course of infection, when it may be too late to fully benefit from life-prolonging treatment. In fact, one recent study showed that a greater percentage (20 percent) of African American youth progressed to AIDS within one year of receiving an initial HIV diagnosis, compared with their white counterparts (14 percent).
- ▶ Too many young African American lives continue to be claimed by AIDS. In 2006, the majority of youth aged 13 to 24 with AIDS who died were black (63 percent). Today, AIDS is the third leading cause of death among black women aged 25 to 34 and black men aged 35 to 44, many of whom become infected at a younger age.

¹ The term men who have sex with men is used in CDC surveillance systems. It indicates the behaviors that transmit HIV infection, rather than how individuals identify their sexuality.



Complex Factors Increase Risk

- ▶ **High prevalence of HIV:** African Americans of all ages face a higher risk of being exposed to infection with each sexual encounter than do other racial/ethnic groups. This is because the burden of HIV is greater in African American communities than in any other racial/ethnic group, and because African Americans are likely to have sexual relations with other African Americans. Therefore, even with levels of individual risk behaviors (e.g. unprotected sex, multiple partners) that are comparable to other races/ethnicities, African Americans face a higher risk of infection.
- ▶ **High prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs):** Data also show that the burden of STDs is far higher in African American communities than in any other racial/ethnic group; for example, gonorrhea rates among African Americans in 2007 were 19 times as high as those of whites. Because STDs such as syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia can increase the risk of HIV transmission, this likely contributes to higher HIV incidence among black men and women.
- ▶ **Lack of awareness about HIV:** Despite the heavy toll of HIV among younger African Americans, data show us that concern about HIV is declining in this population. Research also shows that African Americans are less likely to be aware of their HIV status. In fact, the rate of undiagnosed HIV infection among blacks was nine times that among whites. This is critical, considering the majority of new sexually transmitted HIV infections are believed to be transmitted by those who are unaware of their infection.
- ▶ **Stigma:** The stigma associated with HIV and homosexuality may help to spread HIV in African American communities. Fear of disclosing risk behavior or sexual orientation prevents many from seeking testing, treatment and support from friends and family. As a result, too many in African American communities lack critical information about how to prevent infection.
- ▶ **Socioeconomic factors:** The stark realities of some African Americans' lives can also increase HIV risk. These include higher levels of poverty, racial discrimination, lack of access to healthcare, and higher rates of incarceration, which disrupt social networks. Studies have shown, for example, that lower income and educational attainment are significant factors contributing to new infections among African Americans who contract HIV, despite low risk behaviors.

HIV: Protect Yourself

Be smart about HIV. Here's what you can do to reduce your risk of infection:

Get the facts — Arm yourself with basic information: Are you at risk? How is HIV spread? How can you protect yourself?

Get control — You have the facts; now protect yourself and your loved ones. There are three essential ways to reduce your risk:

1. Abstain from sex (i.e., anal, vaginal or oral).
2. Only have sex (i.e., anal, vaginal or oral) if you're in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner you know is not infected.
3. Use a condom every time you have anal, vaginal or oral sex. (Correct and consistent use of the male latex condom is highly effective in reducing HIV transmission.)

Get tested — Knowing your HIV status is a critical step toward stopping HIV transmission, because if you know you are infected, you can take steps to protect your partners. Also, if

you are infected, the sooner you find out, the sooner you can receive life-extending treatment. In fact, CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 be tested for HIV. Because other STDs can play a role in the acquisition of HIV, knowing whether you are infected with either is critical in reducing your risk for infection. Call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.hivtest.org to find HIV and STD testing locations near you.

Get talking — Talk to everyone you know about HIV — friends and family, coworkers and neighbors, at work and at places of worship. Have ongoing and open discussions with your partners about HIV testing and risk behaviors. Talking openly about HIV can reduce the stigma that keeps too many from seeking the testing, prevention and treatment services, and support they need.

HIV doesn't have to become part of your life. Each of us can and must be part of the solution.

Visit www.actagainstaids.org for more information about HIV and what you can do to stop HIV.

If you are a member of the news media and need more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/Newsroom or contact the News Media Line at CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (404-639-8895 or NCHHSTPMediaTeam@cdc.gov).