Many young HIV-infected MSM unaware of infection

This study evaluated the magnitude and distribution of unrecognized HIV infection among men who have sex with men and their risk behavior.

MSM aged 15-29 years were interviewed and tested for HIV at 263 randomly sampled venues in 6 US cities from 1994-2000.

Of 5,649 MSM participants, 573 (10%) tested positive for HIV. Of these, 91% of black, 69% of Hispanic, and 60% of white MSM (77% overall) were unaware of their infection. The 439 MSM with unrecognized infection reported a total of 2,253 male sex partners in the prior 6 months; 51% had unprotected anal intercourse; 59% perceived low risk for HIV; 55% had not been tested in prior year.

The HIV epidemic among MSM in the U.S. remains unabated partially because many young HIV-infected MSM do not know of their infection and unknowingly expose their partners to HIV infection.


Alcohol use and victimization predicted high risk sex

Young adults are at significant risk for HIV infection. Researchers examined data for 3,437 adults aged 23-24 for the general population of the U.S., testing for the associations between three measures of sexual risk for HIV, various forms of substance use, victimization and partner violence.

Alcohol use and victimization predicted high risk sexual behavior in independent samples of single and married/cohabitating adults. Marijuana use, problem drug use, and partner violence were inconsistently related to sexual risk behavior across measures and subsamples.

The victimization variable was manifest in indicators of physical assault victimization, victimization by sexual assault or threats of sexual assault, and victimization by theft. An association was found between hitting one’s domestic partner and inconsistent condom use.

HIV prevention tailored for young adults in the general U.S. population should focus on persons who use alcohol frequently and who are victims of violence.


Longer relationship with person having HSV-2 increases risk

This study evaluated risk for HSV-2 infection among men whose female partners have genital herpes (GH). The length of partnership predicted HSV-2 infection, with longer relationships associated with increased risk. History of STD was associated with HSV-2 infection. Potentially modifiable risk factors for HSV-2 included engaging in vaginal sex during symptomatic episodes, never using condoms, and lower GH knowledge.


8% of AIDS cases in 2003 in rural areas

In 2003, 8% of AIDS cases were from nonmetropolitan areas, up from 6% in 1994. The rate per 100,000 for rural areas was 7.1 (23.5/100,000 for urban areas).

Lesbian and bisexual women have low perceived risk and limited knowledge of STD

Research has found that STD transmission can occur between female sexual partners. Lesbian women have an unusually high prevalence of bacterial vaginosis (BV), which may represent an STD in this population. BV leads to an increased risk for acquiring gonorrhea and HIV and can lead to problems in reproductive health. Few studies have focused on STD transmission in the context of lesbian and bisexual relationships.

This study determined STD risk and prevention behavior, STD knowledge, and perceptions of risk among lesbian and bisexual women.

**Methodology**

Focus group discussions were conducted with 23 self-identified lesbian and bisexual women aged 18-29. Questions covered how common and acceptable participants considered a variety of sexual practices among lesbians. Topics included the use of lubricants, use of sex toys, cleaning of sex toys, knowledge and views of sexual practices that can lead to STD transmission among lesbian women, practices intended to prevent STD transmission, motivation and barriers to engage in preventive behaviors, and needed information about vaginal health.

**Outcomes of the Study**

Thirteen participants self-identified as lesbians and 18 as bisexual. Most were white (n=18) and the rest were Asian, black, Hispanic. One-half of the women aged 18-22 reported a history of BV and three women reported a history of STD. Major findings include:

- Women reported little use of preventive behaviors with female partners (washing hands, using rubber gloves, cleaning sex toys).
- Women reported that vaginal penetrative practices using sex toys and fingers or hands were common.
- Participants reported that sex toys were frequently shared during a sexual encounter generally without condoms.
- Knowledge of potential for STD and BV transmission between women was limited.
- Participants viewed the use of barrier methods such as gloves or condoms as acceptable providing there was a reason to use them and that they are promoted in the context of health and pleasure.
- Participants perceived less risk for becoming infected with an STD through oral sex than through penetrative sex.
- Participants perceived the need for STD reduction behaviors to be the primary concern of heterosexual women.
- Participants perceived little risk for STD transmission between women.

**Implications for Prevention**

Lesbian and bisexual women may underestimate their risk for STD. Their perceived vulnerability to STD may be informed by a social messages, perception of sex partners, and stigma.

Safe sex messages aimed at lesbian and bisexual women should emphasize the plausability of STD transmission between women and the personal responsibility for partners' well-being. Also, messages should target common sexual practices and promote health sexuality.

**SOURCE:**