

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.

SOURCE: MacKellar, D. A., et al. (2005). Unrecognized HIV infection, risk behaviors, and perceptions of risk among young men who have sex with men. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*, 38, 603-614.

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.

SOURCE: Collins, R. L., et al. (2005). Isolating the nexus of substance use, violence and sexual risk for HIV infection among young adults in the United States. *AIDS and Behavior*, 9, 73-87.

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.

SOURCE: Ranal, R. K., et al. (2005). Demographic, behavioral, and knowledge factors associated with herpes simplex virus type 2 infection among men whose current female partner has genital herpes. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 32, 308-313.

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).

SOURCE: CDC. (2005). HIV/AIDS surveillance in urban-nonurban areas L206 slide series (through 2003). Available: www.cdc.gov/hiv/graphics/rural-urban.htm

RAP Time is a monthly AIDS/STD prevention bulletin published by the Rural Center for AIDS/STD Prevention (RCAP) at Indiana University, Bloomington. RCAP is a joint project of Indiana University, Purdue University and the University of Colorado. The major focus of RCAP is the promotion of HIV/STD prevention in rural America, with the goal of reducing HIV/STD incidence.

The opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the cooperating universities.

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*Rural AIDS/STD prevention. rap (rap) v. *Slang*. To talk freely and openly.

Vol. 9, No. 5, May 6, 2005

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 plausibility 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:

Marrazzo, J. M., et al. (2005). Sexual practices, risk perception and knowledge of sexually transmitted disease risk among lesbian and bisexual women. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 37, 6-12.