

Prevalence and Awareness of HIV Infection Among Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM) in Metro Atlanta: Updated Data – 2011

DATA FROM THE 2011 ATLANTA HEALTH SURVEY IMPLEMENTED AS PART OF THE NATIONAL HIV BEHAVIORAL SURVEILLANCE (NHBS) SYSTEM

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Background

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 20% of the estimated 1.2 million people living with HIV in the United States are unaware of their infection.¹ Men who have sex with men (MSM) account for nearly half of all HIV prevalence nationwide and more than half of all new infections. Additionally, MSM is the only risk group in which new HIV infections are increasing.²

Awareness of HIV infection is necessary for linkage to care and treatment options. With access to antiretroviral therapy, persons living with HIV experience improved health outcomes such as suppressed viral load, which is also associated with reduced likelihood of transmission of HIV to others.³

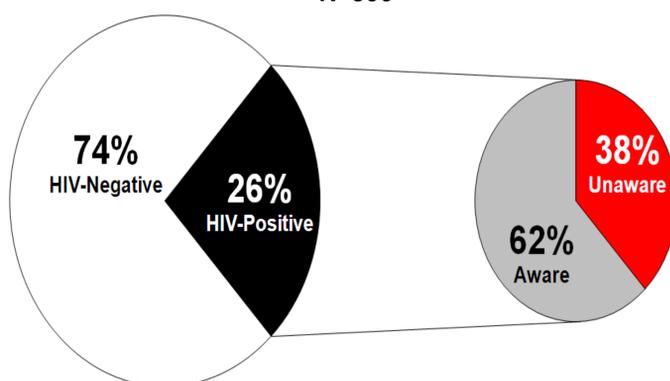
In 2011, health departments throughout the U.S. collaborated with CDC to implement the National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) to assess and monitor HIV-related behavior among MSM. To obtain a random sample of MSM, venue-based, time-space sampling methods were used.⁴

Methods

To report on the prevalence of HIV infection among MSM who participated in our behavioral surveillance in Atlanta, researchers at the Georgia Department of Public Health analyzed data from HIV tests conducted as part of the 2011 Atlanta Health Survey.

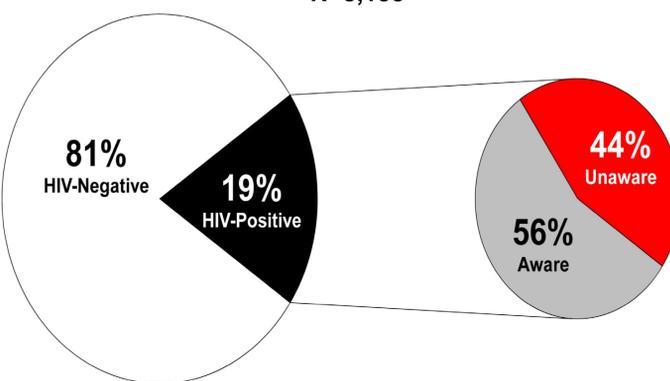
On 45 separate dates from September to December 2011, men were approached and screened for participation in the survey at 32 venues frequented by MSM throughout Atlanta. Of the men who were screened, 583 met survey eligibility criteria. Men were excluded from this analysis if they did not consent to and complete both the survey and an HIV test, did not report sex with another male during the past 12 months, had an indeterminate HIV test result, or reported being HIV-positive but had a negative test result. Data from surveys and corresponding HIV tests for a total of 506 sexually active MSM met the criteria for inclusion in this analysis.

Figure 1. Prevalence and awareness of HIV infection among MSM in Metropolitan Atlanta in 2011
N=506



Source: Data from the 2011 Atlanta Health Survey, implemented as part of NHBS.

Figure 2. Prevalence and awareness of HIV infection among MSM in 21 U.S. Cities in 2008
N=8,153



Source: CDC analysis of data from the 2008 implementation of NHBS⁴

Findings

- Among 506 sexually active MSM randomly selected and tested at venues throughout metro Atlanta who participated in our study, prevalence of HIV infection was 26% (Figure 1), including 50 men newly-diagnosed with HIV who were unaware of their infection and 83 men previously diagnosed with HIV.

- Among the HIV-positive MSM who participated in our study, 38% were unaware of their infection.

- Among the sexually active MSM who participated in our study, the prevalence of HIV infection was higher than in sexually active MSM in 21 cities in 2008 (Figure 2); and this difference was found to be statistically significant.

- Of the 50 men who were newly-diagnosed with HIV, almost all (94%) had been tested at least once during their lifetime and many (66%) had been tested during the past 12 months. (Table 1)

- A total of 17 study participants (34%) had not been tested at all during the past 12 months.

- The most frequently reported main reason for not having an HIV test during the past 12 months was “no particular reason,” followed by “afraid of finding out that you had HIV.”

Table 1. Date of most recent HIV test, among MSM newly-diagnosed with HIV, metro Atlanta – 2011

| | No. | (%) |
|----------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Tested within the past 12 months | 33 | (66) |
| Tested 1-2 years ago | 4 | (8) |
| Tested more than 2 years ago | 10 | (20) |
| Never tested for HIV before | 3 | (6) |
| Total | 50 | (100) |

Conclusions

- Findings support the need to promote at least annual testing among MSM throughout metro Atlanta, especially since 66% of newly-diagnosed men had been tested for HIV at least once during the past 12 months yet were unaware of their current HIV-positive status.

- HIV testing programs in targeted venues (such as bars, pride festivals and clubs) should be strengthened and expanded given the effectiveness of this approach in identifying men with undiagnosed infection and the potential for earlier diagnosis and linkage to care.⁵

- More detailed analysis of NHBS 2011 data is needed to identify racial/ethnic disparities and trends by MSM subpopulation, including differences in risk behavior and differences in utilization of HIV prevention resources such as free condoms and publicly-funded programs for HIV prevention and risk reduction.

Limitations

- Findings are not representative of all MSM in metro Atlanta as surveys were only conducted in bars, gyms, parks, sex clubs and other venues that met criteria for safety and had sufficient MSM attendance and only sexually-active MSM were included in this analysis.

- Findings might not be generalizable to other cities.

- The number of men unaware of their infection may be inflated. Some men who knew their positive status may have described themselves as HIV-negative to the interviewer due to stigma associated with HIV infection.

- The prevalence of HIV in the 2011 Atlanta Health Survey might be higher than in 21 cities in 2008 because of the three-year time difference.

References

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The findings and conclusions in this poster are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent official positions of the Georgia Department of Public Health. The National HIV Behavioral Surveillance System (NHBS) is a project of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention implemented in partnership with health departments throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

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