

# HIV 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 more than half (57 percent) of all new HIV infections among young people aged 13 to 24. 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

- Blacks account for almost half of the more than one million people estimated to be living with HIV in the United States (44 percent), and of new HIV infections each year (44 percent).
- African American youth are particularly affected. Of the nearly 21,000 infections estimated to occur each year among African Americans, one-third (34 percent) are among young people aged 13 to 24.
- Young African American men, particularly young black men who have sex with men (MSM)<sup>1</sup>, as well as African American women, are severely impacted.
- Among those aged 13 to 24, black males have higher rates of infection than any other race/ethnicity.
  - The rate of new infections among young black males aged 13 to 24 is 11 times as high as that of young white males and four times as high as that of young Hispanic males.
  - Young black MSM are especially hard-hit, comprising the majority (86 percent) of new infections among young black males and accounting for more new infections (4,800 in 2010) than any other subgroup of MSM by race/ethnicity and age.
    - HIV incidence among young black MSM is almost three times that of young white or Hispanic MSM in the 13- to 24-year-old age group.
    - In a study of 21 major U.S. cities in 2008, 21 percent of black MSM between the ages of 18 and 30 were HIV-infected and more than 70 percent of those infected were unaware.
- Young black females are far more affected by HIV than young females of other races.
  - The rate of new infections among young black females aged 13 to 24 is six times as high as that of young Hispanic females, and 20 times that of young white females.
  - The majority of young black females with HIV are infected through heterosexual contact.
- HIV treatment helps people with HIV live healthy lives and prevent transmission of the virus to partners. However, among African Americans who have been diagnosed with HIV, youth are less likely than those who are older to receive care and treatment. A recent CDC study found that only 21 percent of those aged 18-24 were prescribed antiretroviral treatment and 18 percent had their virus under control, compared with 46 percent and 35 percent, respectively, among blacks overall.

<sup>1</sup> 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 self-identify in terms of their sexuality



## Multiple, 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 prevalence 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., sex without a condom, multiple partners) that are comparable to other races/ethnicities, African Americans face a higher risk of infection with each sexual encounter.
- **High prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs):** The prevalence of STDs is higher in African American communities than in any other racial/ethnic group. Because STDs can place individuals at higher risk for HIV infection, higher STD prevalence may contribute to higher HIV incidence among black men and women.
- **Lack of awareness about HIV:** Research also shows that many African Americans with HIV are unaware of their status (about 17 percent). This is critical, considering that about half of new HIV infections in the U.S. are believed to be transmitted by those who are unaware of their infection.
- **Stigma:** Fear of disclosing risk behavior or sexual orientation may prevent many from seeking testing, prevention and treatment services, and support from friends and family.
- **Socioeconomic factors:** The stark social and economic realities that exist in some African American communities may lead to increased HIV risk. These include poverty, racial discrimination, lack of access to healthcare, and higher rates of incarceration, which can disrupt social networks and decrease the number of available partners for women.

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