

HIV AND STD PREVENTION FOR MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

Despite significant declines in HIV infection rates since the early years of the epidemic, men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to be the population at highest risk for HIV and many sexually transmitted disease (STD) infections. The HIV epidemic, which began primarily among white gay men, is now dramatically affecting African-American and Hispanic/Latino MSM. Although there have been significant reductions in high-risk behaviors among MSM, motivating individuals to maintain long-term behavior change is required. In addition, recent outbreaks of STDs, including syphilis, have occurred among MSM in urban areas, signifying the presence of unsafe behaviors that make this population vulnerable to continued STD and HIV transmission. Prevention efforts must be expanded to reach MSM of all races, be sustained over time, and be initiated anew for each generation.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

The rise in HIV and STD infection rates among African-American and Hispanic/Latino MSM can be attributed to various factors: difficulties in consistently practicing safer sex; incorrect assumptions about a partner's infection status; lesser concern of infection with available antiretroviral treatments; and a lack of direct experience with HIV or STDs. Effective HIV and STD prevention approaches should address audiences in terms appropriate for their age and relevant to their culture and lifestyle. Research indicates that interactive programs led by peer leaders are very effective in improving communications skills and enhancing self-esteem among MSM participants. CDC has prioritized prevention for MSM in its *HIV Prevention Strategic Plan*, with the goal of significantly reducing the disease toll among high-risk populations. CDC is also conducting a four project epidemiologic study of risk behaviors of African-American and Hispanic/Latino MSM to improve understanding of risk influences.

Example of Program in Action

Bienestar Human Service's *Sabores Program* provides outreach, prevention case management, individual and group level interventions, and HIV counseling, testing and referral to Hispanic/Latino young men who have sex with men (YMSM) in East Los Angeles and Pomona, California. In the first year of the program, over 1,500 YMSM were contacted during outreach, provided risk reduction information, and referred for other prevention services. Group level interventions were provided to 144 YMSM with 61 YMSM receiving prevention case management services, and over 1,000 YMSM attending informational events. Participants in the program have reported a decrease in high-risk behavior, greater social connectiveness, and a decrease in depression.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Social, behavioral, and healthcare services need to be supported and expanded. Evaluation and close collaboration with CDC's community-based and health department partners are key in improving these services. Further, additional behavioral research studies to better measure HIV and STD risk is needed to understand contemporary risk influences and respond with new interventions for gay men, especially YMSM.

For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/program

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