

Start Talking. Stop HIV.

Preventing New HIV Infections through Open Conversations

CDC has launched *Start Talking. Stop HIV.*, a new national campaign for gay and bisexual men that promotes communication between sexual partners about HIV risk and prevention strategies. Research suggests that communication leads to behaviors, such as testing and HIV status disclosure, that can help reduce HIV risk. However, important conversations about HIV do not occur within many relationships due to fear of discrimination.

To increase life-saving conversations, *Start Talking. Stop HIV.* provides gay and bisexual men with practical tools and tips for bringing up important HIV prevention topics like:

- HIV testing and their HIV status
- Condoms and engaging in lower-risk sexual behaviors
- Medicines that prevent and treat HIV

To bring these conversations to life, the campaign features real-world gay and bisexual men talking openly with their partners and sharing their experiences communicating about HIV.

Gay and bisexual men whose lives have been affected by HIV helped create *Start Talking. Stop HIV.* More than 500 men participated in interviews and surveys on concepts, messages and images, resulting in creative that can speak to gay and bisexual men of all races and ethnicities in all types of relationships, from casual to long-term.



Why Important Conversations about HIV Do Not Occur Within Many Relationships

Men who have sex with men (MSM) – including those who inject drugs – account for more than half of the 1.1 million people living with HIV in the United States (57 percent, or an estimated 657,800 people) and approximately two-thirds of all new HIV infections each year (66 percent, or an estimated 31,400 infections).^{1,2}

However, data show that many gay and bisexual men don't always talk about HIV with their sexual partners, which limits their ability to protect themselves and their partners from the disease. For example, a recent study of men who have sex with men in 21 cities found that more than one-third (37 percent) did not know the HIV status of their most recent male sex partner.³ And a recent survey of MSM found that only 65 percent discussed HIV status with their partners in the past six months.⁴

Many gay and bisexual men may still find it difficult to talk openly with their sexual partners about HIV.⁵ For some gay and bisexual men, fear of the stigma associated with HIV may discourage them from speaking up. A CDC study of HIV-positive gay and bisexual men found that nearly two-thirds (62 percent) felt that there is discrimination against people with HIV even within the gay community.⁶



Open Communication Leads to Healthy Bodies and Healthy Relationships

The campaign empowers gay and bisexual men to discuss HIV without stigma or shame. Talking openly builds trust and lets men make informed decisions about their sexual health. Research shows that among gay and bisexual men, communication between partners is associated with increased condom use, HIV testing and HIV status disclosure.

Start Talking. Stop HIV. reflects the reality that for gay men it's not always easy to bring up HIV with a sexual partner, and that the barriers to frank dialogue are real and challenging. To help gay and bisexual men start these critical conversations, the campaign provides specific topics for discussion in a positive framework.

Start Talking. Stop HIV. Components

The campaign is designed to reach gay and bisexual men in their everyday lives. Campaign elements include:

- **National advertising** – Print and online advertisements in media outlets that reach gay and bisexual men
- **Community engagement** – Outreach to gay and bisexual men at gay pride and other community events across the country
- **Promotional materials** – Posters and postcards for distribution by local public health agencies, businesses and community-based organizations
- **Campaign website** (www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/starttalking/index.html) – Information and resources about HIV transmission, testing and prevention, as well as practical tips for starting conversations about HIV with sexual partners, including videos featuring gay and bisexual men talking about their personal experiences
- **Social media** – Conversation starters for partners to discuss their HIV status and HIV trivia questions shared on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ActAgainstAIDS) and Twitter (@TalkHIV)

Start Talking. Stop HIV. is the latest campaign of CDC's *Act Against AIDS initiative*, a national communication campaign to combat complacency about HIV in the United States. The campaign helps advance the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, which calls for reducing new infections, reducing stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and educating Americans about the threat of HIV and how to prevent it.

Other elements of the Act Against AIDS campaign that reach MSM include:

- *Testing Makes Us Stronger*, a targeted campaign for African American gay and bisexual men
- *Reasons/Razones*, a targeted campaign for Latino gay and bisexual men
- *Let's Stop HIV Together*, a national campaign for all Americans

References

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- ² CDC. Estimated HIV Incidence Among Adults and Adolescents in the United States, 2007–2010. HIV Surveillance Supplemental Report 2012;17(4). <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/#supplemental>. Published December 2012.
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- ⁴ Winter AK et al. Discussion of HIV status by serostatus and partnership sexual risk among internet-using MSM in the United States. *JAIDS*. 2012 Aug 15;60(5):525-9.
- ⁵ Sullivan KM. Male self-disclosure of HIV-positive serostatus to sex partners: a review of the literature. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*. 2005 Nov-Dec;16(6):33-47.
- ⁶ Courtenay-Quirk C, Wolitski RJ, Parsons JT, and Gomez CA. Is HIV/AIDS Stigma Dividing the Gay Community? Perceptions of HIV-positive Men Who Have Sex With Men. *AIDS Education and Prevention* 18.1(2006):56-67.