

HIV, STD Prevention Programs Urgently Needed, Researchers Conclude

New research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concludes that high-risk sexual behaviors were common among HIV-infected and uninfected young African American men having sex with men (MSM) in North Carolina, and that HIV and STD prevention programs targeting young Black MSM, both in colleges and the community, are urgently needed.

The new data on HIV infections and risk behavior among college-age African American gay and bisexual men was among findings released last month by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at the 11th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in San Francisco. Another CDC presentation examined what is known about sexual behavior and HIV risk among African American men on the “down low,” a group that has been studied very little in the past.

High-risk behavior is frequent in young African American MSM, regardless of whether they are HIV infected, college students, or not in college. High rates of HIV infection among young African American MSM have previously been reported in the scientific literature. In May 2003, the North Carolina Department of Health identified 49 new cases of HIV among Black MSM and invited CDC to participate in an in-depth epidemiological and behavioral investigation.

Dr. Lisa Fitzpatrick led a CDC team conducting a study of HIV-infected college students, uninfected college students and uninfected non-students to assess differences in behavior and other factors that may contribute to risk of HIV infection. A total of 53 African American MSM completed the survey; all were between 18 and 30 years of age.

Reported risk behavior was frequent for all three groups: 40 percent of HIV-infected college students reported unprotected anal intercourse with a casual sexual partner in the past year, compared to 33 percent of uninfected college students and 27 percent of uninfected non-students. Though this study did not test for gonorrhea at the time of HIV diagnosis, other research indicates that the presence of another STD increases the likelihood of HIV transmission by two to five times.