



# HIV and AIDS among Gay and Bisexual Men

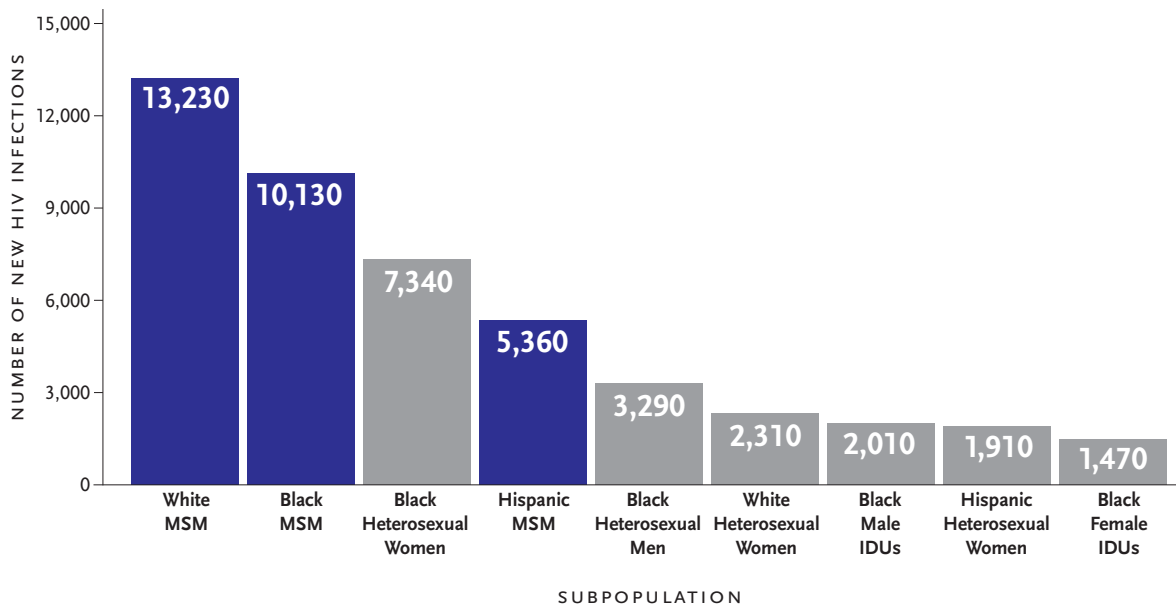
Gay and bisexual men — referred to in CDC surveillance systems as men who have sex with men (MSM)<sup>1</sup> — of all races continue to be the risk group most severely affected by HIV. Additionally, this is the only risk group in the U.S. in which the annual number of new HIV infections is increasing. There is an urgent need to expand access to proven HIV prevention interventions for gay and bisexual men, as well as to develop new approaches to fight HIV in this population.

## A Snapshot

- ▶ MSM account for nearly half of the more than one million people living with HIV in the U.S. (48%, or an estimated 532,000 total persons).
- ▶ MSM account for more than half of all new HIV infections in the U.S. each year (53%, or an estimated 28,700 infections).
- ▶ MSM is the only risk group in the U.S. in which new HIV infections are increasing. While new infections have declined among both heterosexuals and injection drug users, the annual number of new HIV infections among MSM has been steadily increasing since the early 1990s.

### Estimates of New HIV Infections, 2006, by Race/Ethnicity, Risk Group, and Gender for the Most Affected U.S. Subpopulations\*\*

Gay and bisexual men of all races and black heterosexuals account for the greatest number of new HIV infections in the United States.



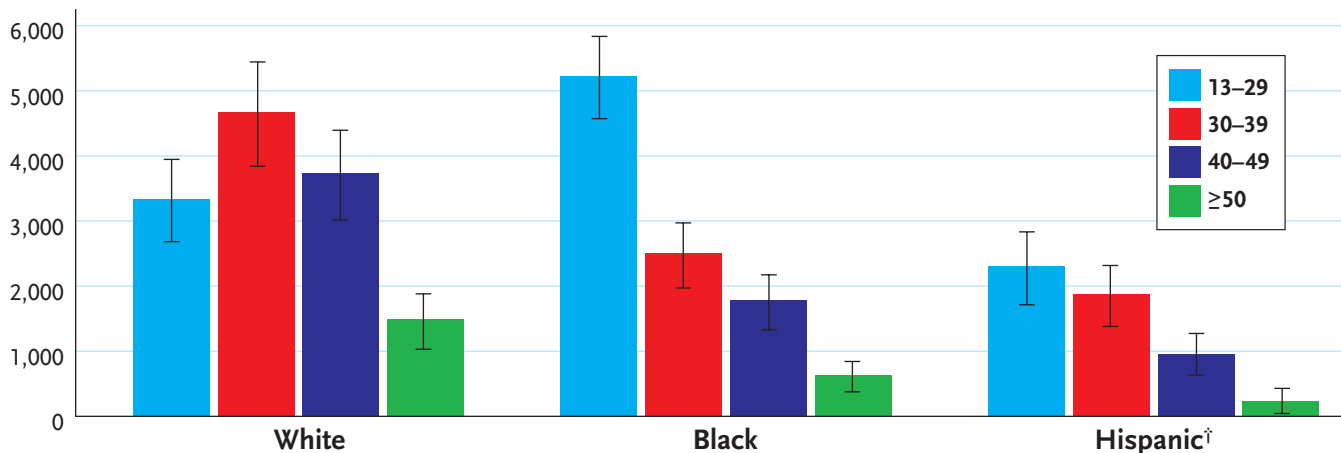
\*\*Subpopulations representing 2 percent or less of the overall U.S. epidemic are not reflected in this chart.

<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.



- ▶ According to the latest estimates, white MSM represent a greater number of new HIV infections than any other population, followed closely by black MSM — who are one of the most disproportionately affected subgroups in the U.S.
- ▶ The primary ages at which MSM become infected differ by race:
  - **Young Black MSM:** Most new infections among black MSM occur among young black MSM. In fact, there are more new HIV infections among young black MSM (aged 13–29) than among any other age and racial group of MSM. The number of new infections among black MSM in this age group is roughly twice that of their white and Hispanic counterparts (5,220 infections in blacks vs. 3,330 among whites and 2,300 among Hispanics).
  - **White MSM in their 30s and 40s:** Most new infections among white MSM occur among those aged 30–39 (4,670), followed by those aged 40–49 (3,740).
  - **Young Hispanic MSM:** Among Hispanic MSM, most new infections occur in the youngest (13–29) age group (2,300), though a substantial number of new HIV infections also occur among those aged 30–39 (1,870).

**Estimated Number\* of New HIV Infections in Men Who Have Sex with Men, by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group, United States, 2006**



\* Incidence estimates are adjusted for reporting delays and reclassification of cases reported without a known risk factor for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) but not for underreporting  
 † Non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks are referred to as white and black, respectively. Persons of Hispanic ethnicity might be of any race  
 Note: The “I” bars denote the data range for each confidence interval

- ▶ A study of MSM in five U.S. cities found extremely high levels of infection among MSM, and many of those infected did not know it.
  - Overall, one in four MSM participating in the study was infected. Black MSM were twice as likely to be infected with HIV than other MSM.
  - Among all of those who were infected, about half were unaware of their HIV status. Results were particularly alarming for black MSM and young MSM, with more than two-thirds of infected black MSM, and nearly 80 percent of infected young MSM (aged 18–24), unaware that they were infected.
- ▶ AIDS continues to claim the lives of too many MSM. Since the beginning of the epidemic, more than 274,000 MSM with AIDS have died.



## Complex Factors Increase Risk

- ▶ **High prevalence of HIV:** The high prevalence of HIV among gay and bisexual men means MSM face a greater risk of being exposed to infection with each sexual encounter, especially as they get older. For young black MSM, partnering with older black men (among whom HIV prevalence is high) may also lead to increased risk.
- ▶ **Lack of knowledge of HIV status:** Studies show that individuals who know they are infected take steps to protect their partners. Yet many MSM are unaware of their status and may unknowingly be transmitting the virus to others. Additionally, some MSM may make false assumptions or have inaccurate information about their partner's HIV status. It is critical to ensure that sexually active MSM get tested for HIV at least annually, or more frequently as needed.
- ▶ **Complacency about risk:** Among young MSM in particular, complacency about HIV may play a key role in HIV risk, since these men did not personally experience the severity of the early AIDS epidemic. Additional challenges for many MSM include maintaining consistently safe behaviors over time, underestimating personal risk, and the false belief that because of treatment advances, HIV is no longer a serious health threat. We must reach each generation of MSM and develop programs that can help MSM remain uninfected throughout the course of their lives.
- ▶ **Social discrimination and cultural issues:** For some MSM, social and economic factors, including homophobia, stigma, and lack of access to health care may increase risk behaviors or be a barrier to receiving HIV prevention services.
- ▶ **Substance abuse:** Some MSM use alcohol and illegal drugs, contributing to increased risk for HIV infection and other STDs. Substance use can increase the risk for HIV transmission through risky sexual behaviors while under the influence and through sharing needles or other injection equipment.

## HIV: Protect Yourself

Be smart about HIV. Here's what you can do to reduce your risk of infection:

**Get the facts** — Arm yourself with basic information: Are you at risk? How is HIV spread? How can you protect yourself?

**Take control** — You have the facts; now protect yourself and your loved ones. There are three essential ways to reduce your risk:

1. Don't have sex (i.e., anal, vaginal or oral)
2. Only have sex (i.e., anal, vaginal or oral) if you're in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner you know is not infected
3. Use a condom every time you have anal, vaginal or oral sex. (Correct and consistent use of the male latex condom is highly effective in reducing HIV transmission.)

**Put yourself to the test** — Knowing your HIV status is a critical step toward stopping HIV transmission, because if you know you are infected, you can take steps to protect your

partners. Also, if you are infected, the sooner you find out, the sooner you can receive life-extending treatment. In fact, CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 be tested for HIV. Because other STDs can play a role in the acquisition of HIV, knowing whether you are infected with either is critical in reducing your risk for infection.

Call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit [www.hivtest.org](http://www.hivtest.org) to find HIV and STD testing locations near you.

**Start talking** — Talk to everyone you know about HIV – friends and family, coworkers and neighbors, at work and at places of worship. Have ongoing and open discussions with your partners about HIV testing and risk behaviors. Talking openly about HIV can reduce the stigma that keeps too many from seeking the testing, prevention and treatment services, and support they need.

**HIV doesn't have to become part of your life. Each of us can and must be part of the solution.**

Visit [www.actagainstaids.org](http://www.actagainstaids.org) for more information about HIV and what you can do to stop HIV.

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