Gay Urbanites More Aware of Their HIV Status, but Prevalence Holds Steady

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A survey of 20 major urban areas has found that gay and bisexual men's awareness of their HIV status has increased, but that this shift has not changed the overall prevalence of the virus in this population, MedPage Today reports. Cyprian Wejnert, PhD, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) presented the latest results of the ongoing National HIV Behavioral Surveillance System at the 20th Conference of Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Atlanta.

The latest analysis compares surveys taken in 2008 and 2011, respectively, at dance clubs and bars frequented by men who have sex with men (MSM). A total of 7,847 men in 2008 were offered anonymous HIV testing, and 8,423 in 2011.

Within the 2011 sample, 18 percent were tested positive for HIV, compared with 19 percent in 2008. Among those with a positive test result, 66 percent were previously aware of their HIV status in 2011, compared with 56 percent in 2008. There was a correlation between both prevalence and awareness of HIV and increased age in both the 2008 and 2011 survey participants.

There were significant racial disparities in the results: The prevalence of HIV was 30 percent among African Americans and 14 percent in Caucasians. Just 54 percent of blacks were aware of their HIV status, compared with 86 percent of whites. Nevertheless, awareness did increase across racial and ethnic groups between 2008 and 2011.

These results are not necessarily applicable to the country at large, both because urban areas have a higher prevalence of HIV and because they receive extra public health efforts as a consequence. Furthermore, the study's method of selecting participants just at clubs and bars may not produce a representative sample of the gay population.

To read the conference abstract, click here.

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