CDC Studies Debunk Black Down Low Myths

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In an interview with NPR's Michel Martin, Kevin Fenton, MD, director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), discussed a series of CDC studies aimed at curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS misinformation in the black community.

The CDC studies paid particular attention to the "down low" myth, which is based on the suspicion that black men who secretly have sex with men are transmitting HIV to their female sexual partners at an alarming rate.

"It's critically important to know that we're dealing with a very complex epidemic, certainly among the black community," Fenton said. "And black women are bearing a disproportionate burden of disease compared with their white or Hispanic counterparts. It's also important to realize that about one in five black women become infected because of injecting drugs. And about 80 percent of women acquire the infection through sexual transmission from male partners who are HIV infected."

But, he explained, "It is crucially important to bear in mind that there are a range of risk factors which face black women in the United States today. And the reality is that bisexual black men account for a very, very small proportion of the overall black male population in the United States. Our research suggests that about 2 percent of black men will report being bisexually active.

"And, therefore, you need to look at the risk factors which are far more prevalent in the community—having multiple sexual partners with unprotected sex with heterosexual partners, injecting drugs. Those are going to be factors which are far more prevalent in the population and are driving risks."

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/down-low-msm-fenton-cdc-17493-5966