Study: Few Canadian Seniors Vacationing in Florida Get Tested for HIV, STIs

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Fewer than one in five so-called “snowbirds,” or Canadians older than 50 who spent at least one month in the past year vacationing in Florida, have been tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, according to researchers at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, as reported by Canwest News Service.

According to graduate student Katie Mairs and Sanda Bullock, PhD, a gerontology professor at the school, most snowbirds who had been tested did so solely for insurance reasons, meaning that the number of Canadian seniors who actively seek out information about their sexual health is “relatively low.”

The prevalence of HIV among people older than 50 is highest in southern Florida, Bullock said, and people older than 40 account for the segment with the fastest-growing HIV incidence in the United States.

“HIV and sexually transmitted infections are an issue that seniors, particularly once they’re out there dating and meeting new people again, need to be aware of and consider,” Bullock said, “because after years of being in marriages…they’re out in a different world than they were before.”

The fact that they’re on vacation, she said, only exacerbates the issue.
Many senior citizens consider HIV and STIs to be young people’s illnesses, and older people are also less likely to use condoms due to the relatively low risk of getting their partners pregnant, explained Bullock.

“We need to get a dialogue going where people are comfortable speaking about sex and sexual-risk issues,” said Bullock, “so that we don’t see a growing risk of HIV infection [in Canada] as they have already seen in the southern states.”

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