Heavy Drinking Linked to HIV Transmissions

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Gay men who drink heavily are more likely to become infected with HIV, and those who are heavy drinkers and also have unprotected receptive anal intercourse have a doubled likelihood of seroconverting. Publishing their findings in the journal AIDS, researchers studied a group of 3,725 HIV-negative men in the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (MACS) between 1984 and 2008.

At the study's baseline, the median number of drinks per week the men reported was eight, with the middle two quartiles ranging between two and 16 drinks. Thirty percent of the participants reported multiple partners with whom they had unprotected receptive anal intercourse over the previous two years. During more than 35,870 person-years of follow-up, 529 of the men contracted HIV.

The researchers deduced that moderate drinking, defined as an average of one to14 drinks per week, was associated with a 10 percent increased likelihood of seroconversion compared with men who did not drink. There was a 61 percent greater likelihood for those who drank heavily, meaning more than 14 drinks per week.

Among the heavy drinkers, those who reported an average of one or fewer partners with whom they had unprotected receptive anal in the prior two years had a 37 percent greater likelihood of seroconverting compared with men who didn't drink, and those with more than one unsafe sex partners had a 96 percent increased likelihood of contracting HIV.

The investigators concluded that interventions to reduce heavy drinking should be integrated into existing HIV prevention efforts.

To read the study's abstract, click here.

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