Heavy Poppers Use Linked With Higher Cancer Risk in Older HIV-Negative Gay Men

The increased risk of some virus-associated cancers, such as non–Hodgkin lymphoma, did not appear driven by increased sexual risk taking.

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The heavy use of poppers, or nitrate inhalants, is associated with an increased risk of some virus-related cancers among HIV-negative men who have sex with men (MSM) between the ages of 50 and 70, aidsmap reports. Findings of a recent analysis suggested that this increased risk was not driven by a higher rate of sexual risk taking among this population.

Publishing their findings in the journal AIDS, researchers studied data on 3,223 MSM, including 1,563 who had HIV and 1,660 who did not, enrolled in the U.S. Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (MACS). The men had at least one study visit between 1996 and 2010 and were encouraged to return about once a year after enrolling in the study.

The men had a median age of 43 when entering the study and were followed for a median 11 years. Seventy-two percent of them were white, 18.8 percent were Black and 8.5 percent were other ethnicities.

During the study, 296 participants were diagnosed with 327 cancers.

After adjusting the data for demographic factors, number of sexual partners and CD4 cell count, the researchers identified a 3.24-fold increased risk of virus-associated cancers among HIV-negative MSM 50 to 70 years old who used poppers heavily (meaning daily or weekly use), compared with a control group of light users (meaning monthly use) and nonusers. Such cancers include non–Hodgkin and Hodgkin lymphomas, caused by Epstein-Barr virus, and anal cancer, caused by human papillomavirus (HPV).

The investigators did not find a significant link between heavy poppers use and virus-associated cancer in HIV-positive MSM.

To read the aidsmap article, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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