Non-Injection Drug Use Linked to Greater HIV Infection Risk

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The use of poppers and erectile dysfunction (ED) drugs is strongly associated with recent HIV infection in men who have sex with men (MSM), according to a study presented yesterday at the 2007 National HIV Prevention Conference in Atlanta.

James Carey, PhD, MPH, of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, and his colleagues collected data on 111 MSM in Chicago and Los Angeles who had recently been infected with HIV. Carey's team compared their data to the records of 333 HIV-negative MSM in the same cities. There were no significant differences between the recently infected men and the HIV-negative men in terms of age, employment, race or ethnicity, or level of education. The recently infected men did tend to have a slightly lower household income.

The recently infected men reported a higher prevalence of having one or more HIV-positive sex partners than the HIV-negative men. Also, men with one or more recently diagnosed sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) were more likely to have been recently infected with HIV.

Carey's team analyzed the use of drugs and alcohol in both sets of men. The six most frequently reported substances reported by both groups of men included alcohol, poppers, marijuana, methamphetamine, ED drugs like Viagra (sildenafil), and gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB). The recently infected men reported more drug use (except for alcohol and marijuana) during sex than the HIV-negative men. Recently infected men reported more than four times as much poppers usage, and more than three times as much use of methamphetamine and ED drugs.

After controlling for a number of variables, Carey's team found that the factors most strongly associated with recent HIV infection included unprotected anal intercourse with an HIV-positive partner, having a prior STD, use of poppers, and use of ED drugs.

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