HIV Rates Declining in Some Older Americans

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The rate of new HIV and AIDS diagnoses among blacks and Hispanics ages 50 and older declined between January 2001 and December 2005, according to a study presented at the National HIV Prevention Conference in Atlanta. Among older whites, the rate actually increased during this four-year period, indicating a need to increase awareness of HIV infection the older U.S. population.

To describe trends in the HIV/AIDS epidemic among people 50 years of age and older, Laurie Linley, MPH, from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, and her colleagues analyzed data from the national HIV/AIDS Reporting System, which collects data on HIV and AIDS diagnoses in 33 states with confidential names-based reporting systems. Adult and adolescent cases of HIV and AIDS diagnosed between January 2001 and December 2005—and reported to the CDC through June 2006—were included in the analysis.

Of 39,944 people diagnosed with HIV in 2001, 5,330 (13 percent) were among people aged 50 and older. In 2005, 37,331 people were diagnosed with HIV, and 5,753 (15 percent) were 50 and older. This slight increase in the proportion of older people diagnosed with HIV did not actually translate into a higher rate of cases overall, as the total population of Americans 50 and older also increased during the same period. Thus, the number of new diagnoses per 100,000 people in the general population actually remained stable during this same period among people in that age group.

Linley's group noted racial discrepancies among older people being diagnosed with HIV. Blacks 50 and older are 12 times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV than whites, and Hispanics are over five times more likely to be diagnosed than whites. In people under 50, blacks are seven times more likely to be diagnosed than whites, and Hispanics have rates three times higher than whites.

Men who have sex with men are the subgroup of older Americans most likely to become infected. They account for 53 percent of new diagnoses among older Americans, compared with 19 percent who were infected through injection-drug use and 20 percent who were infected through heterosexual sex.

The percentage of people who progressed to AIDS within 12 months of being diagnosed with HIV is also much higher among older Americans, indicating that people 50 and over are getting tested much later in their disease process than younger people. Fifty-three percent of those 50 and older developed AIDS within 12 months of an HIV diagnosis compared with 37 percent of those under

the age of 50.

One bit of good news reported, however, is that the rates of HIV diagnoses among some older Americans decreased somewhat between 2001 and 2002. Among blacks, the rate decreased by 3.8 percent, and among Hispanics the rate decreased by 7.3 percent. Among white Americans, however, the rate increased 4.2 percent.

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