Men Who Falsely Believe PrEP and Alcohol Don’t Mix Less Likely to Take It

This mistaken belief, which mirrors that of some individuals prescribed HIV treatment, may compromise PrEP’s reach.

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HIV-negative men who have sex with men (MSM) who falsely believe that Truvada (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate/emtricitabine) and alcohol are a toxic mix are less likely to express interest in taking the antiretroviral (ARV) as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). This is according to a survey conducted among MSM attendees of a recent gay pride festival.

These mistaken beliefs about the supposed toxicity of consuming alcohol while on ARVs for HIV prevention are also common among people taking the medications for HIV treatment and may undermine these individuals’ adherence to their regimens.

Publishing their findings in the Journal of the International AIDS Society, researchers surveyed 272 sexually active HIV-negative MSM at the October 2015 Atlanta Gay Pride Festival. A total of 118 (43 percent) of them reported recent condomless anal sex and multiple sex partners, which according to the researchers designated them as standing to benefit from PrEP.

Ninety-one percent of the participants reported currently using alcohol and nearly two thirds reported binge drinking.

More than three quarters of the men endorsed at least one belief about the supposed toxic nature of mixing PrEP and alcohol. Sixty-one percent (168 of 272) said Truvada and alcohol should never be mixed. Forty-two percent (115 of 272) said an individual on PrEP should stop taking it if he or she is drinking.

Of the 108 PrEP candidates who reported currently using alcohol, 66 percent (73) were interested in taking PrEP.

After adjusting the data for various factors, the researchers found that compared with the men who were not interested in taking PrEP, the men who were interested were 17.09 times more likely to know someone else who took PrEP, 66 percent less likely to binge drink and 57 percent less likely to endorse beliefs about the supposed toxic nature of mixing Truvada and alcohol.

Nine percent (24) of the participants, including 20 percent of those who were good candidates for PrEP, said they were currently on Truvada. Eighty-eight percent (21) of them reported current alcohol use, and 54 percent (13) reported binge drinking. Half of the men on PrEP endorsed at least one belief about the toxicity of combining Truvada and alcohol. One third of the men on PrEP said alcohol and Truvada should never be mixed.

The authors concluded: “Messages to increase PrEP awareness and adherence may [help] counter erroneous beliefs about mixing alcohol with antiretrovirals in the context of PrEP.”

To read the study abstract, click here.

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