# HIV Rate Is Four Times Higher Among Mental Health Patients

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People receiving care for mental health problems are four times more likely to be living with HIV than the general population, and many are unaware of their status, revealing a key demographic for targeted HIV screening programs. Publishing their findings in the American Journal of Public Health, researchers provided rapid HIV testing to 1,061 people who sought treatment for depression, psychosis or substance abuse in Philadelphia and Baltimore between January 2009 and August 2011.

A total of 51 people tested positive for HIV. The 4.8 percent prevalence rate is four times higher than the rate for each respective city and about 16 times higher than the U.S. prevalence rate. Thirteen of those who had a positive test result, or 26 percent, were not previously aware they had HIV.

Those whose mental illness symptoms were more severe had a higher likelihood of being HIV positive.

“These findings paint a recent picture of HIV infection rates in the community and reinforce how important it is to identify patients and get them into appropriate infectious disease care in a timely manner while being treated for mental illness,” lead author Michael B. Blank, PhD, associate professor in psychiatry at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and the study’s lead author, said in a release. “With such a high-risk group, it’s imperative to be routinely testing patients to improve care and reduce transmissions to others. Historically, though, HIV testing is often not implemented in mental health care.”
To read the study abstract, click here.
http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301633?prevSearch=michael+blank&searchHistoryKey=

To read the study press release, click here.

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