PrEP Is Associated With Lower Anxiety About Contracting HIV

An Australian study also found that, overall, such anxiety was higher among younger gay and bisexual men.

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Among gay and bisexual men, the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is associated with a moderate reduction in anxiety about contracting HIV, according to an Australian study.

Researchers at the Kirby Institute at the University of New South Wales in Sydney analyzed data from the Following Lives Undergoing Change (Flux) study, a national online, prospective observational study of drug use among gay and bisexual men in Australia. In 2018, the study added a question about anxiety regarding HIV transmission.

The study authors, who published their findings in the Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes, stratified the 1,547 HIV-negative respondents to the Flux survey into two categories: One group was at high risk of contracting the virus according to Australia's PrEP use guidelines (26.2% of the men), and another was at low risk (73.8%).

The men had an average age of 37 years old. Ninety-one percent identified as gay.

A total of 51.6% of the men said they sometimes had concerns about whether their sexual encounters were safe, and 52.5% said they sometimes worried about HIV before sex. A total of 25.9% said HIV comes to mind during sex.

The study graded the men's HIV-related anxiety on a scale that had 18 as a maximum score.

Those who were 25 years old or younger had higher HIV anxiety scores than men age 50 or older. Men who were in a regular relationship had lower anxiety scores than men not in a relationship.

Among the men at high risk of contracting HIV, those who used PrEP had an HIV anxiety score of 8.5, compared with a score of 10.4 among those not taking PrEP. After adjusting the data to account for various differences between the two groups, the study authors found that PrEP was associated with an 8% lower HIV anxiety score.

There was no such difference among the men at low risk for the virus.

“We’ve known for some time that PrEP is very good at protecting people from HIV,” the Kirby Institute’s Phillip Keen, a co–lead author of the paper, said in a press release. “This new evidence suggests that another benefit of taking PrEP is improved mental health, through reduced anxiety about HIV.”

To read a press release about the study, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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