What’s the Tea on Trans People With HIV?

New research sheds light on HIV among transgender men and women

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2,351 transgender people in the United States were diagnosed with HIV between 2009 and 2014. Of these, 84% were trans women, 15% were trans men and 1% had another gender identity. Black trans women and young trans women had the highest HIV diagnosis rates, followed by Latinas.

A recent study analyzed electronic health records from nearly 600 trans men and other transmasculine individuals designated female at birth who received care at the Callen-Lorde Community Health Center in New York City. Forty-three percent had ever been tested for HIV, and 2.8% of them were positive; among Black transmasculine people, the rate was substantially higher, at 6.8%.

Eleven percent of the cohort members who reported having sex only with cisgender (non-trans) men and 3.5% who had sex with both cisgender men and people of other gender identities had HIV. A total of 2.1% of those who reported sex only with cisgender women had the virus, as did 0.2% of those who had sex with cisgender women and others.

The researchers concluded that studies looking at HIV risk among transgender people should investigate behavioral risk factors as well as the specifics of their gender identity and that of their partners. They added that transgender men should be included in HIV prevention efforts.

Another study looked at 420 trans women from six Eastern and Southern cities in the United States.

Twenty-nine percent were HIV positive, and 5% had hepatitis C virus. Further, 48% had genital herpes, 14% had syphilis, 5% had chlamydia and 2% had gonorrhea. Black women had higher rates of HIV (more than 50%), herpes (over 70%) and syphilis than those in other racial or ethnic groups. Women who were homeless or had unstable housing and those who were not employed full-time had higher disease rates.

A third recent study found that over a 10-year period, HIV-positive trans women took antiretroviral treatment for longer stretches and spent more time with an undetectable viral load, compared

with cisgender people.

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