# Young People With HIV Are Less Likely to Be Undetectable

A recent NIH study found that adults have a much higher viral suppression rate than youth.

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Adolescents and young adults who have been linked to care and treatment for HIV have low rates of viral suppression, or having an undetectable viral load, compared with older individuals. A recent study funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) found evidence suggesting that more promptly linking young people to medical care after an HIV diagnosis may improve their chances of achieving full suppression of their viral load.

As described in the Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes, researchers analyzed data from the Adolescent Medicine Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions (ATN), an NIH-supported collection of 13 sites that provide care and treatment for young people with HIV.

A total of 1,411 HIV-positive youths between 12 and 24 years old were referred to the ATN sites. Of those, 75% were then enrolled in medical care, 34% remained in care and started antiretroviral (ARV) treatment and just 12% achieved a fully suppressed viral load. By comparison, among older adults referred to care, other studies have found rates of viral suppression of 32% to 63%.

Compared with youths referred to care three months or longer after their HIV diagnosis, those referred within one to six weeks of their diagnosis were 2.5 times more likely to achieve full viral suppression, and those referred within six weeks to three months were nearly twice as likely to have an undetectable viral load.

The study authors called for the use of trained peer counselors and for clinics to maintain frequent contact with young HIV-positive individuals through texts or direct messages on social media in order to buttress their adherence to a care and treatment regimen. Researchers, they added, should develop new strategies to help keep this population engaged in care.

“Our findings indicate an urgency for research on how best to tailor HIV intervention services to the needs of youth,” said the study’s first author, Bill G. Kapogiannis, MD, of the Maternal and Pediatric Infectious Diseases Branch at NIH’s Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

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

To read the study abstract, click here.

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