HIV-Risky Business Persists Among Adolescents

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WASHINGTON — The findings of a large survey reinforce the ongoing prevalence of risky sexual and substance abuse behavior among young people that could promote the spread of HIV infection, Angulique W. Outlaw, Ph.D., said in a poster at the Ryan White CARE Act meeting on HIV treatment.

To investigate the prevalence of risky behaviors and teens' and young adults' attitudes toward HIV, Dr. Outlaw of the Children's Hospital of Michigan, in Detroit, and her colleagues surveyed 751 adolescents and young adults aged 13-24 years, who received HIV counseling and testing in community-based venues. These included field locations such as parks and public events (38%), health clinics (24%), detention facilities (23%), and community drop-in centers (15%).

Overall, 12% of the respondents identified themselves as men who have sex with men (MSM) exclusively, 5% were men who have sex with men or women, 28% were high-risk heterosexuals, 54% were moderate- or low-risk heterosexuals, and 1% were "other."

The number of respondents who defined themselves as MSM exclusively was higher than expected, Dr. Outlaw said in an interview.

A total of 82% of the respondents reported having sex without using a condom, and 23% reported having a sexually transmitted disease (chlamydia or gonorrhea) within the past 90 days.

In addition, 58% reported any alcohol use during the past year, 46% reported using marijuana during the past year, and 43% reported having sex in conjunction with alcohol or drug use.

Females were significantly less likely to use condoms compared with males, and they also had a significantly higher incidence of STDs.

Younger respondents (aged 13-18 years) reported significantly more marijuana use and had significantly higher rates of gonorrhea and chlamydia compared with those aged 19-24 years.

The survey also included questions about attitudes toward HIV and HIV testing. Overall, 56% of the respondents felt that they had placed themselves at risk for HIV during the past year, and 82% said they were "definitely ready" to get tested for HIV.

The study participants appeared to be receptive to HIV education and testing.

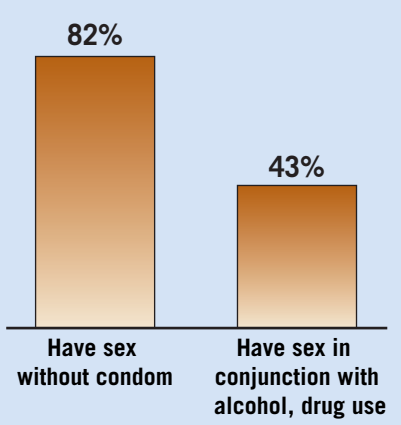
Overall, 56% felt that they had placed themselves at risk for HIV during the past year, and 82% said they were "definitely ready" to get HIV tests.

A majority of 89% said that they would "definitely" return for HIV test results, and 77% did return. The returning subjects included a majority of both 13- to 18-year-olds (72%) and 19- to 24-year-olds (87%).

Although the researchers did not include the results of the respondents' HIV tests, data published in 2004 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that 13% of HIV infections in the United States that year occurred in 13- to 24-year-olds, and ongoing research suggests that the incidence of new HIV infections in young people aged 13-24 in the United States has not declined.

The study was limited by the use of self-reports and a convenience sample, the investigators said. ■

Youth Put Themselves at Risk of Contracting HIV



Note: Based on a study of 751 people aged 13-24 years.
Source: Dr. Outlaw