

Women and HIV/AIDS

World AIDS Day is each December 1st. Today it is estimated that there are over one million people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S., including nearly 280,000 women. (1) Although more men than women represent the majority of HIV/AIDS cases, the impact on women has grown since the beginning of the epidemic. In Los Angeles County (LAC) as of 2009, there are over 42,000 persons living with HIV/AIDS and 1 out of 8 of them is a woman. (2)

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Although men and women share similar HIV/AIDS effects, some characteristics and complications are unique to women. Women are more biologically susceptible to HIV infection than men during sex, and women with HIV/AIDS also have increased risk for recurrent vaginal yeast infections, severe pelvic inflammatory disease, and cervical cancer. (3,4) The main form of HIV transmission for women is heterosexual intercourse, followed by injection drug use.

Groups at Highest Risk

- Women of color have been disproportionately affected and represent the majority of new HIV infections and AIDS cases among women in both LAC and the U.S. In LAC, black women have the highest annual AIDS rate of any racial/ethnic group - nearly 5 times higher than the rate for Latinas and 14 times the rate for whites in 2006. (2). In the U.S., black women accounted for 66% of estimated AIDS cases among women diagnosed in 2007. (5)
- In the U.S., younger women are more likely than older women to get HIV. Over half of new HIV infections among women were among ages 13–39 in 2006. (1)

Challenges for Women

Women have unique issues and special challenges that make it harder for them to prevent HIV or take care of themselves if they have HIV. (5)

- Many women with HIV/AIDS are low-income with limited access to health care compared to men. Women are less likely to be insured and may have fewer financial resources, less access to transportation, and an added responsibility of caring for families. (6)
- Women who have HIV can give it to their babies during pregnancy, delivery, or by breast-feeding.
- Women may lack control in relationships.
 - Scared to say no to sex
 - Scared to insist their partner (husband or boyfriend) use a condom

- Don't know if their partner is doing things that put him (and therefore her) at risk for HIV
- Women may be caregivers for others and not feel they have the time to take care of themselves.

What can women do?

Learn about HIV/AIDS, practice safe sex and get tested for HIV. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that all adolescents and adults at increased risk for HIV infection be screened for it, including all pregnant women. (7)

What can communities, health professionals, and local agencies do?

Promote awareness, host testing events, and educate the public on HIV/AIDS and what people need to do to protect their health and their loved ones.

Prevention Matters!

References

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