

HIV & THE LATINO COMMUNITY

HOW COMMON IS HIV AMONG LATINOS?

The Latino community has been hit hard by the HIV epidemic. Though Latinos make up approximately 15 percent of the U.S. population, they accounted for 17 percent of all new HIV cases in 2006. The rate of new AIDS cases among Latinos is nearly four times higher than among non-Hispanic whites.

DOES HIV AFFECT LATINOS DIFFERENTLY?

Advances in HIV treatment have benefited people of all racial and ethnic groups. While AIDS deaths have declined overall, the decrease has been more dramatic among non-Hispanic whites than among people of color. While it is not believed that HIV progresses faster or that HIV treatment is less effective in Latinos, it is possible that they receive less adequate health care than non-Hispanic whites.

Latinos are also at a higher risk for other health problems, which can make managing HIV infection more difficult. These include:

- **Heart health.** Heart disease and stroke are the leading causes of death among Latinos in the United States, and Mexican-American men are twice as likely, compared with non-Hispanic whites and blacks, to have high cholesterol. Because antiretrovirals (ARVs), and HIV itself, can also increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, monitoring heart health is an important part of an HIV-positive Latino's health care.
- **Diabetes.** Latinos are almost twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to develop this disease, where the body is unable to properly control the amount of sugar in the blood. Left untreated, diabetes can cause damage to the kidneys, eyes, heart and nerves. ARVs have been linked to an increased risk of blood sugar problems, so HIV-positive Latinos may want to address the diabetes risk factors they can control: by exercising, eating healthy and keeping their weight down.
- **Hepatitis C.** Latinos are roughly 25 percent more likely than non-Hispanic whites to suffer from this life-threatening form of liver disease, caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hep C is harder to treat in HIV-positive people and can increase the risk of ARV liver side effects.

ACCESS TO CARE

Studies show the more HIV experience your doctor has, the better your HIV health care will be. Unfortunately, many HIV-positive Latinos are uninsured or underinsured. Immigration status also plays a huge role in health coverage, as both documented and undocumented immigrants are often barred from receiving government benefits like Medicaid. Fortunately, government programs funded through the Ryan White CARE Act, such as the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), are available to people regardless of their immigration status. Also, hospitals are not allowed to turn anyone away who requires emergency care. AIDS service organizations (ASOs) can help Latinos access the health care services they need.

Language is another barrier to necessary health care. Many HIV-positive Latinos do not speak English fluently. Some clinics and hospitals have Spanish-speaking staff—including doctors, nurses, social workers and translators—to help patients communicate. Don't hesitate to ask for this kind of help.

QUICK TIPS

Use these helpful hints to increase your chances for a long, healthy and happy life.

■ BUST THE MYTHS

Learn as much as you can about HIV and the epidemic. Word on the street isn't always true. Be curious and ask questions.

■ HISTORY LESSON

Make sure your doctor knows all about your medical history—and your family's, too. Some health concerns, like heart disease and diabetes, can run in your family.

■ TESTS

Understanding all your lab tests and what they mean, not just your CD4 count and viral load, will help you remain in charge and in control of your health.

■ DOCTOR RELATIONS

Remember, your doctor works for you, or at least he or she should. If your doc doesn't treat you with respect and understanding, find one who does.

■ SUPPORT

Surround yourself with family members, friends and professionals who care about and support you in the ways you need it.

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