



African American Women and HIV in Texas

Texas Department of State Health Services HIV/STD Program

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The Big Picture.

African Americans continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS. One in 112 African Americans is living with HIV/AIDS in Texas. The rate of the Black population living with HIV/AIDS in 2007 (891/100,000) was over four times the rate in White persons (201) and about five times the rate in Hispanic persons (177). Black persons also had the highest number and rate of new infections. The 2007 rate of new cases in the Black population (76/100,000) was approximately five to seven times higher than the rates for Hispanics (16) and Whites (11). Notably, the rate of new diagnoses in Black females was over twice as high as the rates in White and Hispanic males and about eight and 14 times higher than the rates in Hispanic and White females, respectively.¹

Risk Factors

The most common way that African American women are infected with HIV is unprotected sex with an infected male.² While high risk heterosexual behavior and drug use are important factors influencing HIV infection rates among Black women, other factors also contribute to circumstances that can lead to HIV transmission. These factors include stigma; biological vulnerabilities; trauma; relationship dynamics; structural influences impacting issues such as poverty, employment, and education; and incarceration.³ In addition, African Americans are more likely than any other race to be in concurrent relationships (overlapping) which could factor into higher rates of HIV and STDs. Concurrent relationships involve having more than one sexual partner in a given period and increases the probability for transmission, because earlier partners can be infected by later partners.³ Concurrency especially impacts Black women given the lower availability of African American men. Higher incarceration rates in the African American community also affect HIV risk. Incarceration decreases the number of men in the community disrupting stable partnerships and promoting higher-risk concurrent partnerships.⁴

Additionally, Black communities traditionally have a high degree of social mixing between higher and lower risk individuals.⁵ This increases the chance that a lower risk individual may have contact with a higher risk individual. Also, given the high rates of HIV and STD in the Black community, the likelihood of being exposed to an infected person is much higher for Black women and men than it is for others living in different communities. Black women thus have to do so much more than other women to protect themselves, even if they are engaging in fewer risk behaviors than White women.⁶

Awareness of Risk

In 2007, Black respondents were more likely to report that they had ever been tested for HIV (63.2%) as compared to White (41.2%) and Hispanic (37.9%) persons. This suggests that the African American community understands that they are at risk yet they are still disproportionately affected by HIV and STD. Moreover, in 2007, over 80% of the HIV cases in Black and Hispanic females were reported as high risk heterosexuals (HRH). Also in 2007, 80% of HRH reported that their partners had multiple partners. In

Texas, persons categorized as HRH reported consistent barrier use only 23.8% of the time. A total of 26.7% of HRH who tested positive for HIV reported consistent barrier use with vaginal sex. Black teenage girls are more likely to use implants and injectable contraception than White teenage girls, perhaps making them less likely to use condoms that protect against HIV.⁷

Out of Care

In Texas, among the major racial/ethnic groups, the Black population had the greatest number with unmet need and had a slightly greater proportion of their population out of care: 33% of Black compared to 31% of Whites and 30% of Hispanics. If you are HIV-positive, the most important attention you can give yourself and your loved ones is to seek care and adhere to medications to stay healthy.

What is Being Done?

The Texas Department of State Health services funds specific HIV prevention interventions for African American women. One of these interventions is called the SISTA Project which is aimed at empowering African American women. This fall DSHS will be hosting a regional forum on Black Women and HIV/AIDS in Texas. The goal of this regional forum is to strengthen the ability of DSHS and their partners to effectively administer and implement HIV/AIDS programs targeting Black women. This is accomplished by convening state representatives, both health department staff and community stakeholders, to explore common ground, and identify current programming gaps and potential solutions. Additionally, the DSHS will be convening roundtables for African American women to help develop a prevention and services agenda for Texas that will meet the needs of African American women.

In 2008, DSHS received funds to research, refine and extend its existing "Fight HIV" social marketing campaign targeting African Americans. The "Strong Black Women" image was designed to reach African American women ages 18-34. The "Fight HIV" brand ties the two campaign ideas together.

The key campaign messages for African American women were as follows:

- African American women need to take precautions to avoid HIV infection
- Free/low-cost HIV testing is available
- HIV care and treatment are accessible to the African American community
- If you are HIV-positive, the most important attention you can do for yourself and your loved ones is to seek care and adhere to medications to stay healthy

HIV hits African American women hard. Fight back. Know your partner's status, get tested, and get care. Support women affected by HIV/AIDS and spread the word about prevention, testing and care.

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FACTS TO CONSIDER:

One in 112 African American Texans is living with HIV/AIDS.

More than 23,000 African Americans in Texans are known to have HIV/AIDS.

The rate of African American Texans living with HIV/AIDS is over four times the rate for White Texans and five times the rate for Hispanic Texans.

The rate of new HIV diagnoses in African American women is 8 to 16 times higher than rates in Hispanic and White women, respectively.

1 out of 3 HIV-infected Texans are diagnosed with AIDS within one year of being diagnosed with HIV (late diagnosis).

Most people who test positive for HIV had previous health care visits but were not tested for HIV.



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