

Health Trends

Conference Addresses Challenges And Opportunities In Reducing HIV

(NAPSA)—AIDS experts recently met to examine the current state of the AIDS epidemic in the United States and discuss new strategies for fighting the disease.

Among presentations given at the 2003 National HIV Prevention Conference in Atlanta, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) unveiled a new national system for monitoring HIV infections in the U.S. The system is expected to have a major impact on the development and evaluation of new strategies to reduce HIV infections.


The new system will help prevention specialists more accurately monitor how many HIV infections occur in the U.S. each year, and will provide a better understanding of the specific populations and areas most affected by the epidemic.

CDC expects the surveillance system to improve public health officials' ability to target HIV prevention resources where they are needed most, and to evaluate the impact of prevention on HIV trends. Introduced on a limited scale beginning in 2001, the system was expanded in 2002, and again in 2003. Data are expected by the end of 2005.

"This system for monitoring HIV in the U.S. is a major new tool in the nation's battle against HIV," said Ronald O. Valdiserri, MD, MPH, Conference Co-Chair and Deputy Director of CDC's

National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention. "Better data on HIV infections will play an important role in shaping prevention strategies for the future."

Other research at the conference addressed the challenges to reducing HIV in the U.S. Today, there are 850,000 to 950,000 people living with HIV—more than at any other point in the epidemic. One-fourth do not know they are infected, and are therefore not

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benefiting from the treatment, care and prevention services that can help them stay healthy, live longer and protect their partners from infection.

New findings examining these and other challenges, as well as new opportunities to stem the spread of the disease, indicate that:

- Doctors of HIV-infected patients are more likely to provide counseling on emotional issues, diet and nutrition, drug use or cigarette smoking than counseling on how patients can protect their partners from infection. However, training can help doctors feel more comfortable discussing sex-related topics with their patients.

- One in five African Americans and Latinos are not aware of available HIV treatments—information that could encourage many to learn their HIV status.

- Forty percent of U.S. women of childbearing age are unaware of available treatments to prevent HIV transmission to newborns, and 20 percent or more of pregnant women in some areas are still not being tested for HIV.

- A new rapid HIV test approved last year shows promise in various settings—substantially increasing the number of people who receive their results.

- There is a significant gap in attitudes between parents and their pre-teen children about sex and related issues. However, parents feel responsible for teaching pre-teens about sex issues and are willing to participate in prevention efforts tailored to their children.

- Problem behaviors among youth, including alcohol and other substance abuse, may predict early onset of sexual activity.

- Gay and bisexual men are increasingly using the Internet to meet sex partners. At the same time, the Internet can be a useful vehicle for delivering HIV and STD prevention messages to at-risk gay and bisexual men.

To get more information on HIV and AIDS, call CDC's National AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS or visit www.cdcnpi.org.