

African American Youth Sexual Behaviors and their Impact  
On HIV Transmission and Infection

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	Page 3
Executive Summary	Page 4
What I Learned from Secondary Research Sources	Page 5
What I learned from Primary Research Sources	Page 9
Charts	Page 16

## **Abstract**

The reported cases of HIV diagnosis have increased throughout recent years, especially within the African American young adult community due to their involvement in at-risk sexual behavior. Their continued at-risk behavior is due to their attitudes about HIV, their awareness about HIV, and their knowledge of HIV, which is inaccurate and incomplete.

Although HIV and public health organizations have made sure African American teens are aware of this infectious disease, their attitude towards this subject is that they don't believe it applies to them. Teens have access to the knowledge of HIV, they just do not care, do not think it is important, and do not take these warnings seriously.

## **Executive Summary**

For African American youth, risky and reckless sexual behavior is the leading cause of infection and transmission of HIV. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), this behavior includes male-to-male sexual contact (48% for adolescent males) and high-risk heterosexual contact (74% for adolescent females).

Our survey of 22 African American women under the age of 25 indicated that: Of 29 participants, 76% were African American and 90% were sexually active. They were aware that HIV can be transmitted through unprotected sex, but did not use condoms on a regular basis.

## Secondary Resources

### About HIV

The number of HIV/AIDS cases in the United States continues to increase. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), out of the estimated 1.185 million people in the United States, 37,331 cases of HIV/AIDS are found in adults, adolescents, and children in 33 states.<sup>1</sup> African Americans make up the majority of cases in the United States. According to the CDC, blacks make up approximately 13% of the United States population and account for almost half of the estimated number of HIV/AIDS cases diagnosed.<sup>2</sup>

According to the 2005 AIDS Statistical Update published by the City of Philadelphia Department of Public Health, of the 17,515 total cases within the city of Philadelphia, 65.7% are black. Of these cases, 77.9% were male and 22.1% were female. The method of transmission included 37.4% from Males having Sex with Males, 35.5% Intravenous Drug Users (IDU), and 20.3% from heterosexual contact.

In 1995, Michael Bloor of the University of Wales published *The Sociology of HIV Transmission*<sup>3</sup>, which reviewed the social behavior context in which HIV transmission occurs in the developing world and in the developed world of Western Europe and the U.S. He looked at many research studies which discussed the impact of heterosexual and homosexual behavior, sex tourism, prostitution, injecting drug users, and blood transfusions. He looked at the impact of risk behaviors on HIV prevention.

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<sup>1</sup> CDC. Glynn M, Rhodes P; June 2005. Estimated HIV prevalence in the United States at the end of 2003. National HIV Prevention Conference; June 2005; Atlanta. Abstract T1-B1101 Accessed January 11, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> CDC. HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, 2004. Vol. 17. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2006: 1-54.

## About HIV and African Americans

Even though African Americans make up only a small percentage of the United States population, they make up the majority of the HIV/AIDS cases in the country. According to data, African Americans are having unprotected sex, which spreads HIV within the community. As a result, the numbers of HIV cases are increasing, blacks with AIDS do not live as long as people of other races, and HIV is the leading cause of death for African Americans.

African Americans are dying because of AIDS. According to the CDC, as of 2002, HIV/AIDS was the number one cause of death in young African American women and the number two cause of death for all African Americans aged 35-44<sup>4</sup>. The number of AIDS cases in African Americans is increasing drastically. The rate of AIDS cases for African American adults and adolescents in 2005 was 10 times the rate for whites and almost 3 times the rate for Hispanics<sup>5</sup>.

Why is the number of HIV cases within the African American community increasing? According to CDC research, there are complex factors influencing transmission, which go beyond race and ethnicity...

*“Race and ethnicity, by themselves, are not risk factors for HIV infection.*

*However, because of a complex set of historical, structural, environmental, and cultural factors—including racism and discrimination, poverty, denial, stigma, homophobia, and limited access to healthcare—African Americans are more vulnerable to HIV infection.*

*Racism, homophobia, incarceration, and stigma associated with being HIV infected are*

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<sup>3</sup> Bloor, Michael. 1995. *The Sociology of HIV Transmission*. SAGE Publications Ltd. London, UK.

<sup>4</sup> CDC. Anderson RN, Smith BL. 2005. Deaths: Leading causes for 2002. National Vital Statistics Reports 2005;53(17):1-92.

<sup>5</sup> CDC. HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, 2004.

*all factors that make it hard to stop HIV/AIDS epidemic in African American communities...As in many communities, homophobia discourages black males having sex with black MSM from identifying themselves as gay or bisexual, and they may miss or not connect with public health messages designed for these groups.”*

In 2005, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)<sup>6</sup> decided to create a telephone survey to see various people’s attitudes and awareness on HIV and their vaccine research. The survey included 3,500 adults from diverse backgrounds. The results were both shocking and unexpected. They learned that 47% of African Americans that participated in this survey believe that an HIV vaccine already exists and that researchers are keeping it a secret. They also learned that among men who have sex with men, only 22% of the African Americans consider HIV/AIDS to be an urgent health problem.

### **About HIV and African American Youth**

More African American teens are becoming infected by HIV compared to the other races. African American teens are becoming sexually active at a young age. They have multiple partners and are not making condom use a necessity. African American teens account for 73% of the new AIDS cases that were reported in 2004. Risky and reckless sexual behavior is the leading cause of infection and transmission of HIV. This behavior includes male-to-male sexual contact (48% for adolescent males) and high-risk heterosexual contact (74% for adolescent females)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Allen, M *et al.* July 28, 2005: Assessing the attitudes, knowledge, and awareness of HIV vaccine research among adults in the United States. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*.

<sup>7</sup> CDC. HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, 2004.

According to CDC's 2005 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)<sup>8</sup>, among U.S black students attending the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade, 67.6% are sexually active, 16.5% had sex before age 13, 28.2% students had sexual intercourse with 4 or more persons, 31.1% did not use protection during their last sexual encounter, and 21% had been tested for HIV. Compared to other races, African American students had the highest percentage of sexual activity.

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<sup>8</sup> CDC. 2005: Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2005; MMWR 55,(SS-5): 1—108, 2006.

## **Primary Research**

### **Interview with Dr. Noble Jones**

Dr. Noble Jones is specialist in internal medicine. His South Philadelphia practice includes over 100 African American patients with HIV. I interviewed Dr. Jones and asked him why HIV is so high in the African American community.

He stated... *“Historically, blacks suffer disproportionately higher than any other race. Out of the ten leading causes of death in the United States, blacks suffer from nine of them. African Americans have a history of being fearful in trusting the medical community.”* He mentioned the Tuskegee experiment. In the 1970s, white doctors used black men who were suffering with syphilis as guinea pigs and did not treat them. He also mentioned that health education, as well as education in general, seems to reach the African American community last. Many blacks do not have insurance or have poor insurance; therefore, they do not qualify for the same amount of healthcare and education as other communities. When HIV was first discovered, a lot of money was placed in the white, gay community. As a result, they became well-educated in HIV transmission and how to protect themselves.

### **Survey of HIV and Young Adult Life**

**Conclusions...**I have learned from this survey that the majority of the teens are sexually active, do not always use condoms, and therefore, at risk of contracting HIV.

**Research Approach...**I was hoping to find out from the survey how sexually active the young adults were, their attitude about HIV, and their knowledge about the topic.

**Methodology...**I developed a survey with 15 questions. These questions were about information on the teens, their sexual behaviors, their knowledge of the transmission of HIV, and their attitude about HIV. I distributed approximately 50 surveys; 10 surveys were given out to teens at a community medical center in South Philadelphia and about 40 were given out to students at my dormitory at Rosemont College.

I decided to make this survey confidential because some of the participants may or may not be comfortable giving out information about their sexual behaviors. I informed the Rosemont students on the cover of the survey that their names are not necessary and if they were not comfortable giving the survey back to me physically, they could slip it under my door. The community health center distributed the survey to their teen patients and collected them.

### **Findings**

As illustrated in the table below...

29 or 59% responded

25 or 86% were female, 4 or 14% were male

22 or 76% were African American

26 or 90% were sexually active

29 or 100% were aware that HIV can be transmitted through unprotected sex

25 or 86% do not use condoms on a regular basis

**Sample Questionnaire....**A copy of the questionnaire follows this section.

### HIV and Young Adult Life Survey

<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>86% female, 14% male</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>76% African American/Black, 14% Caucasian/White, 10% Spanish Decent</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>3% 15-16, 34% 17-18, 55% 19-20, 8% 21-22</b>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>86% Heterosexual, 7% Bisexual, 7% Homosexual</b>
<b>Sexually Active</b>	<b>93% Yes, 7% No</b>
<b>Type of Sex</b>	<b>76% Vaginal, 79% Oral, 10% Anal, 10% Other</b>
<b>Condom Use</b>	<b>14% Always, 31% Often, 27% Occasionally, 28% Never</b>
<b>Believe HIV is transmitted through all types of sex</b>	<b>93% Yes 7% No</b>
<b>HIV Transmission</b>	<b>100% Through Blood 10% Sitting on a toilet an HIV+ person previously used 48% Kissing someone who has HIV\ 100% Having unprotected sex with someone with HIV 18% Through mosquito bites 82% Oral Sex 100 % Sharing needles 17% Sharing utensils 3% Through sweat 90% Through pregnancy (mother to baby) 0% Though coughing 70% Through breast milk 3% Through tears 0% Other</b>
<b>Leading Cause of Death in Black Community?</b>	<b>72% First Leading Cause 21% Second Leading Cause 7% Third Leading Cause 0% Fourth Leading Cause 0% Not a Leading Cause</b>
<b>Know what HIV stands for?</b>	<b>17% Yes 83% No</b>
<b>Cannot tell whether you are HIV+, unless you get tested</b>	<b>93% True 7% False</b>
<b>HIV is curable?</b>	<b>3% True 97% False</b>
<b>You can be treated for HIV to live a normal life?</b>	<b>90% True 10% False</b>
<b>HIV Education</b>	<b>48% TV 14% Radio 28% Friends</b>

	<b>7% A sex partner</b> <b>40% HIV organizations</b> <b>21% Newspapers, magazines</b> <b>52% High school/college courses</b> <b>3% I haven't learned much about the topic</b> <b>10% Other</b>
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HIV and Young Adult Life

1. What is your gender?  
 Female  
 Male
  
2. What ethnicity would you fall under?  
 African American/Black  
 Caucasian/White  
 Spanish decent  
 Asian decent  
 Other, \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How old are you?  
 17-18  
 19-20  
 21-22  
 22-23  
 Other, \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is your sexual orientation?  
 Heterosexual  
 Bisexual  
 Homosexual
  
5. Are you sexually active?  
 Yes  
 No
  
6. If you answered yes to the previous question, which activities would you say you engage in? (You may check more than one)  
 Vaginal Sex  
 Oral Sex  
 Anal Sex  
 Other, \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. How often do you use condoms?  
 Always

- Often
- Every now and then
- Never

8. Do you think HIV can be transmitted through all three of sex listed in Question 6?
- Yes
  - No, which one(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Check all of the ways you believe HIV can be transmitted.
- Through blood
  - Sitting on a toilet an HIV+ person previously used
  - Kissing someone who has HIV
  - Having unprotected sex with someone with HIV
  - If a mosquito bites an HIV+ person, then bites you
  - Oral Sex
  - Sharing needles
  - Sharing utensils
  - Through sweat
  - Through pregnancy (mother to baby)
  - Through coughing
  - Through breast milk
  - Through tears
  - Other, please list \_\_\_\_\_
10. HIV is the \_\_\_\_\_ leading cause of death within the African American/Black community.
- First
  - Second
  - Third
  - Fourth
  - It is not a leading cause of death in the U.S.
11. Do you know what HIV stands for?
- No
  - Yes, what is it? \_\_\_\_\_
12. You do not know whether or not you are infected with HIV, unless you get tested.
- True
  - False
13. HIV is curable.
- True
  - False
14. If you are infected with HIV, and have been tested for it and diagnosed early, there is treatment/medication to help you live a regular, symptom-free, prolonged life?
- Yes
  - No

15. Where have you learned the most about HIV?

- TV
- Radio
- Friends
- A sex partner
- HIV organizations
- Newspapers, magazines
- High school/college courses
- I haven't really learned much about HIV
- Other

Please feel free to write down any questions, concerns, or comments for me below.



## Charts

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

1.) *HIV/AIDS Diagnosis in 2005 in 33 States, Children Included—63% of the children were black*

2.) *Transmission categories of adults and adolescents with HIV/AIDS diagnosed during 2005*

3.) *Sex of adults and adolescents with HIV/AIDS diagnosed during 2005*

4.) *Race/ethnicity of persons (including children) with HIV/AIDS diagnosed during 2005*

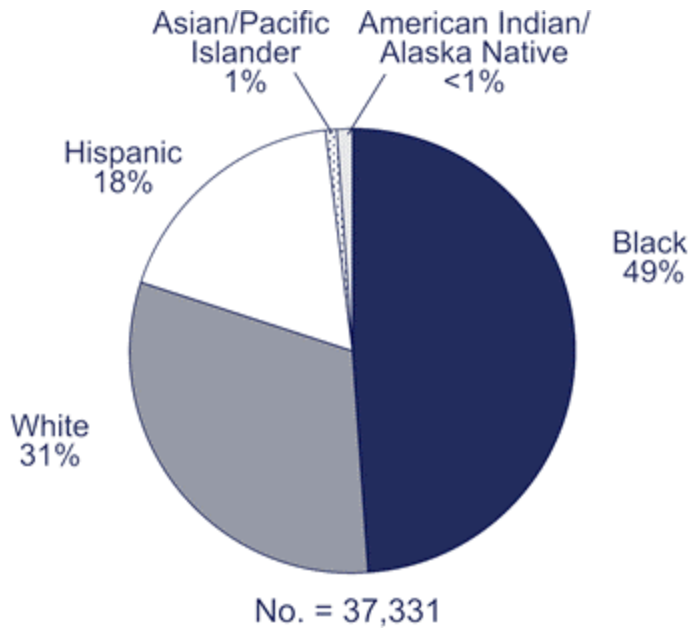
5.) *Proportion of HIV/AIDS Cases among Adults and Adolescents, by Sex and Age Group Diagnosed in 2005—33 States*

6.) *HIV/AIDS Cases among Adolescents 13 to 19 Years of Age, 2005—33 States N=1,255*

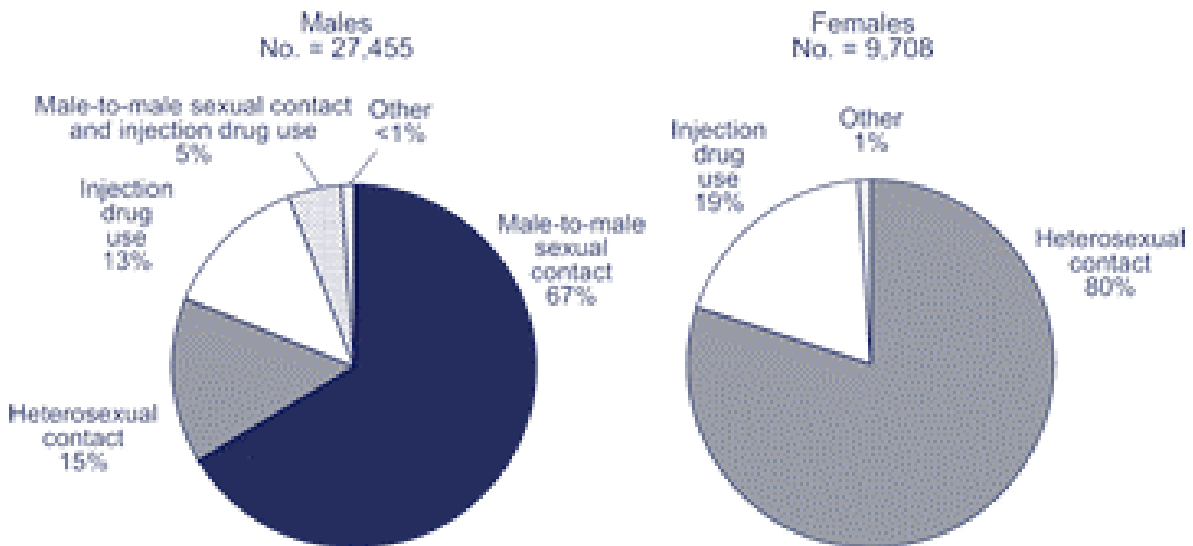
7.) *Proportion of HIV/AIDS Cases and Population among Young Adults 20 to 24 Years of Age, by Race/Ethnicity Diagnosed in 2005—33 States*

## Charts

### 1.) *HIV/AIDS Diagnosis in 2005 in 33 States, Children Included—63% of the children were black*

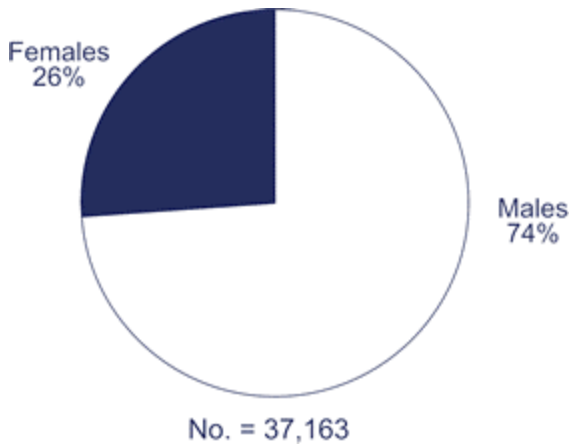


### 2.) *Transmission categories of adults and adolescents with HIV/AIDS diagnosed during 2005*

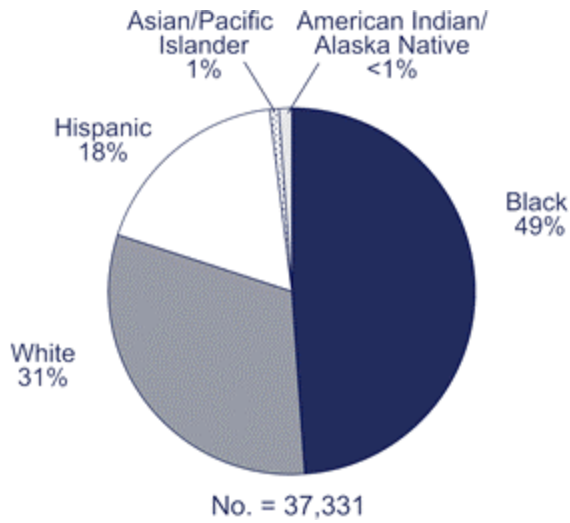


Note. Based on data from 33 states with long-term, confidential name-based HIV reporting.

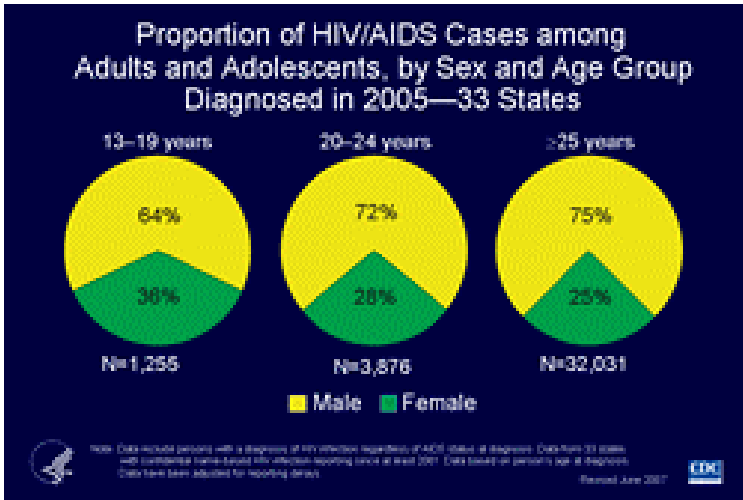
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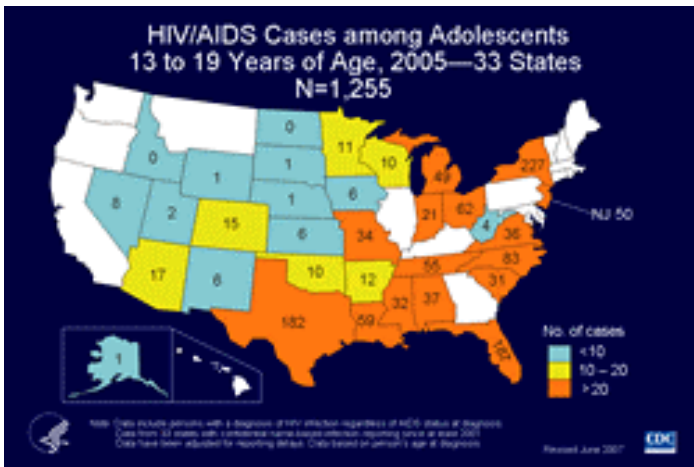
**4.) Race/ethnicity of persons (including children) with HIV/AIDS diagnosed during 2005**



**5.) Proportion of HIV/AIDS Cases among Adults and Adolescents, by Sex and Age Group Diagnosed in 2005—33 States**

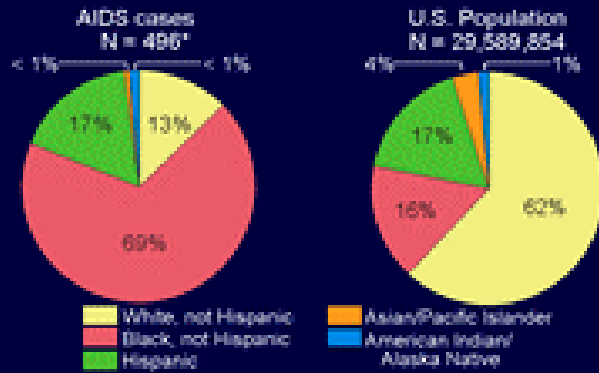


**6.) HIV/AIDS Cases among Adolescents 13 to 19 Years of Age, 2005—33 States N=1,255**



**7.) Proportion of HIV/AIDS Cases and Population among Young Adults 20 to 24 Years of Age, by Race/Ethnicity Diagnosed in 2005—33 States**

Proportion of AIDS Cases and Population among Adolescents 13 to 19 Years of Age, by Race/Ethnicity Reported in 2005—50 States and DC



Note: Data based on person's age at AIDS diagnosis.  
 \*Includes 4 persons of unknown race or ethnicity.

