

## **1/3 of sexually active older adults with HIV/AIDS has unprotected sex**

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One out of three sexually active older adults infected with HIV has unprotected sex, according to a study by Ohio University researchers. A survey of 260 HIV-positive older adults found that of those having sex, most were male, took Viagra and were in a relationship.

AIDS cases among the over-50 crowd reached 90,000 in 2003. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, they will account for half of all HIV/AIDS cases in the United States by 2015 because medical intervention has extended the lifespan of those infected with HIV. Additionally, drugs such as Viagra have made it possible for older adults to remain sexually active longer.

Past studies have shown that up to 65 percent of older adults ages 60 to 71 have sexual intercourse. Among older adults who are HIV-positive, according to the Ohio University findings, 38 percent are sexually active.

“Those who are more likely to engage in riskier behavior – for example, those who are using drugs – are more likely to have unprotected sex,” said graduate student Travis Lovejoy, who led the study along with Ohio University health psychologist Timothy Heckman. “What we don’t know yet is whether these individuals are in a monogamous relationship with someone else who is HIV positive and believe there is no risk of infection.”

The study also found that sexual activity was more prevalent among HIV-positive older adults who were not cognitively impaired, were younger

and who considered their overall health to be good.

Because many older adults with HIV are not sexually active, those who do have unprotected sex account for just 13 percent of the overall number of infected people who are aged 50 or older. However, one-third of those who are sexually active have unprotected sex, which suggests that prevention efforts may need to be more highly targeted toward these individuals.

The behavioral information was pulled from a survey of 260 HIV-positive older adults who were participating in a study examining support groups. The study was funded by a three-year, \$1.8 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute of Nursing Research.

Lovejoy presented the findings at the annual conference of the Society of Behavioral Medicine in March.

Source: Ohio University

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