

Growing HIV Infection Rate Among Females Is Cause for Grave Concern

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HIV/AIDS statistics for women and girls are startling.

Nationwide, the percentage of new [AIDS](#) cases diagnosed among [women](#) more than doubled between 1990 and 2005 (the most recent year for which data is available), increasing from 11 percent to more than 26 percent.

Women of color continue to be disproportionately affected. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), of the 126,964 women living in 2005 with [HIV/AIDS](#), 64 percent were black, 15 percent were Hispanic, and one percent were Asian or Pacific Islander. The CDC also notes that AIDS is the leading cause of death for black women ages 25 to 34.

New Jersey has the highest proportion of women among those living with AIDS in the United States and ranks third among the states in cumulative pediatric AIDS cases, according to a report by the state Department of Health and Senior Services.

“The statistics are ominous but we won’t give up the fight against HIV,” said Andrea Norberg, M.S., R.N., interim executive director of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center (FXBC) at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ). An initiative of the UMDNJ-School of Nursing, the center provides HIV education, prevention, research and treatment services in the U.S. and internationally.

“We’ve seen great progress, especially in preventing mother-to-child transmission and improving quality of life for those infected by HIV,” said Norberg. “However, as the numbers show, we still have a very long way to go in stopping women from getting HIV. Women should take steps to protect themselves, know their status, and seek early treatment if they do become infected.”

Peter Oates, R.N., M.S.N., manager of the center’s health services, works closely with patients at the FXBC clinic at UMDNJ-The University Hospital. In 2008 alone, the clinic served nearly 300 females infected or affected by HIV in the Newark area. That figure includes 27 girls ages two to 12 years; 74 adolescents and young women between the ages of 13 and 24 years; more than 100 women between the ages of 25 and 44 years; and 40 women between the ages of 40 and 64 years. In addition, 45 HIV-exposed infant girls were born to infected mothers and followed by the FXBC last year.

Community outreach is a critical component in the battle against HIV/AIDS. Will an online forum be an effective tool for HIV-infected women to promote healthy living? Pamela Rothpletz-Puglia, Ed.D., R.D., director of nutrition and wellness at the FXBC, and her research team have set out to answer this question through their study comparing the benefits of a custom-built social networking site versus a traditional in-person meeting group for Newark-area women. Results of this study will be used to develop action plans for mobilizing communities to improve women’s health. Study funding is provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

Carolyn K. Burr, Ed.D., R.N., senior education specialist at the FXBC, leads efforts to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Burr is working with hospitals across the U.S. to help them incorporate rapid HIV testing as a routine part of care. The CDC-funded effort, which

first focused on patients in labor and delivery and then patients in emergency departments, now seeks to implement HIV testing for all hospital inpatients.

Provided by University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey

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