

## Study finds teens often willing to accept free or low-cost rapid HIV testing

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Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends routine HIV testing for everyone between the ages of 13-64 as part of their regular medical care, testing rates remain low among adolescents. However, a new study from the Bradley Hasbro Children's Research Center suggests teens who are offered free or low-cost rapid HIV testing are often willing to accept the test.

According to findings published in the May 2011 issue of the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#), more than half of all adolescents accepted a free rapid [HIV](#) test immediately following an HIV risk assessment survey.

The study included 81 at-risk adolescents between the ages of 15-21. More than half of all participants were boys, while 34 percent were Latino and 25 percent were African-American. Overall, 53 percent of [teens](#) in the study accepted the free HIV test, with African-American teens more likely to agree to testing compared to Latino youth (75 percent vs. 39 percent).

"Given that many adolescents are willing to know their HIV status, policies that support free or low-cost routine testing may ultimately help identify more cases of HIV among teens," said lead author Rebecca Swenson, Ph.D., a child psychologist with the Bradley Hasbro Children's Research Center. "Our findings suggest that widespread routine testing is a viable HIV prevention strategy for this particular age group."

With Latinos a growing segment of the population, researchers say

clinicians need to better understand why this group is less willing to be tested so approaches can be developed to increase test acceptance among Latino teens.

"Making HIV/AIDS education and testing outreach services available to adolescents through school-based health centers would help to eliminate barriers to accessing health care that many low-income and ethnic minority families face," says Swenson.

According to Swenson, researchers were also surprised to find that teens with only one sexual partner were nearly five times more likely to accept testing than their peers with multiple partners, who are at higher HIV risk. "It may be that teens reporting only partner may have recently become sexually active with their first partner and had been interested in testing following their first sexual experience," she says.

Alternatively, researchers add it's also possible that teens who feel they are in a monogamous relationship may have been curious about their HIV status as a precursor to, or consequence of, discontinuing condom use.

"This scenario is likely, given that inconsistent condom use with a serious partner was associated with a significant increase in test acceptance," notes Swenson. "While it's encouraging that these teens are being tested, health care workers should continue to promote the use of condoms in monogamous relationships to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy."

Provided by Lifespan

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