

Study shows complexities of reducing HIV rates in Russia

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Results of a new study conducted in St. Petersburg, Russia, show that decreasing HIV transmission among Russian HIV-infected drinkers will require creative and innovative approaches.

While new HIV infections globally have declined, HIV rates remain high in Russia. This is due in large part to injection drug use and spread via heterosexual sex transmission. Alcohol use also has been shown to be related to [risky sexual behaviors](#) and [sexually transmitted infections](#) (STIs).

Published online in *Addiction*, the study showed that a behavioral intervention did not lead to a reduction of STIs and HIV risk behaviors in Russian HIV-infected heavy drinkers when compared to the control group. This study was led by researchers from Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM), Boston Medical Center (BMC) and First St. Petersburg Pavlov State Medical University, Russia.

In this study, HIV's Evolution in Russia - Mitigating Infection Transmission and Alcoholism in a Growing Epidemic (HERMITAGE), the researchers adapted a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-best evidence risk reduction intervention for a Russian clinical setting and assessed its ability to reduce STIs and HIV risk behaviors among 700 HIV-infected heavy drinkers. The intervention stressed disclosure of HIV serostatus and condom use in two individual sessions and three small group sessions. Participants had a laboratory test at a 12-month follow up appointment to determine if they had contracted STIs. They

also answered questions about [risky behaviors](#), including unprotected sex, drinking alcohol or injecting drugs.

At the 12-month follow-up assessment, STIs occurred in 20 subjects (8 percent) in the intervention group and 28 subjects (12 percent) in the control group. Both groups, however, reported having decreased their participation in risky behaviors.

"Addressing prevention of HIV transmission from HIV-infected Russian drinkers, a group at particularly high risk for disease transmission, requires creative approaches and aggressive uptake of antiretroviral therapy," said Jeffrey Samet, MD, MA, MPH, professor of medicine at BUSM and chief of the section of general internal medicine at Boston Medical Center. "This study shows that we need to explore other options to help stem the growing epidemic."

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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