

# New behavioral intervention targets Latino men at high risk of HIV infection

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Men who have sex with men (MSM) accounted for two thirds of all new HIV infections in the United States, with 26 percent occurring in Latinos, according to 2014 data. If those rates continue, it is estimated that one in four Latino MSM may be diagnosed with HIV during his lifetime.

In an effort to reduce those infection rates, scientists at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center, in partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), developed, implemented and evaluated a behavioral intervention program called HOLA en Grupos.

"We found that we can prevent HIV infection among a very hard-to-reach and growing population in the South," said the study's principal investigator Scott D. Rhodes, Ph.D., chair of social sciences and health policy and director of the Program in Community Engagement at Wake Forest School of Medicine, part of Wake Forest Baptist.

"This is one of the first interventions specifically developed for Latino men and we had a 100 percent retention rate, which is unheard of in biomedical, behavioral and translational research."

The findings are published in the April 20 online edition of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

In the study, the researchers evaluated the Spanish language, small-group behavioral HIV prevention program designed to increase condom use

and HIV testing - two methods proven to reduce [infection](#) - among Latinos who have sex with men.

From 2012 to 2015, 304 Latino MSM ages 18 to 55 were recruited in North Carolina and randomized to the four-session HOLA en Grupos intervention or to a general health education intervention. Participants completed structured assessments at baseline and at six-month follow-up.

At follow-up, the HOLA participants reported that consistent condom use during sex had increased from 33 percent to 65 percent, as compared to the control group that reported little change. The HOLA group also reported an increase in HIV testing from 32 percent to 80 percent as compared to the control group, which reported no significant change.

HOLA participants also reported increased knowledge of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, condom use skill, sexual communication skills and decreased fatalism, according to the study.

"This has significant [public health](#) ramifications because we've learned how to reach people at high risk and reduce [infection rates](#)," Rhodes said. "We've developed a guide on how to implement the program so it should be easy to replicate in other states."

Provided by Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

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