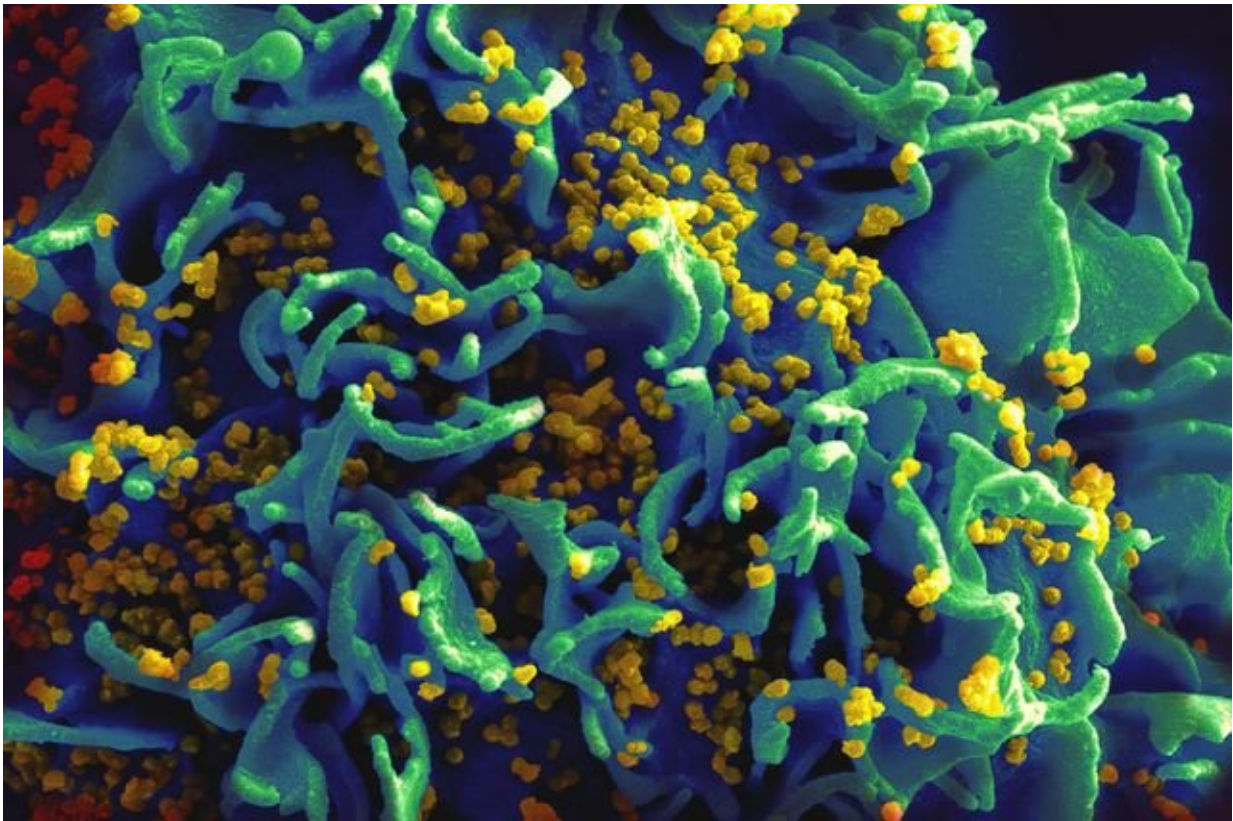


Social connections may prevent HIV infection among black men who have sex with men

May 17 2018, by Enrique Rivero



A scanning electron micrograph of HIV particles infecting a human T cell.
Credit: National Institutes of Health

UCLA-led research suggests that receiving support from friends and acquaintances can help prevent black men who have sex with men from

becoming infected with HIV.

Black men who have sex with men have disproportionately [high rates](#) of HIV infection. While [social connections](#) are known to influence the behaviors that influence people's risk for HIV, little is known about whether they affect the risk for becoming infected with HIV.

The researchers analyzed data from a 2009–11 study that examined a multifaceted intervention for [black men](#) who have sex with men in six U.S. cities. They analyzed the associations between measures of network support—personal and emotional, financial, medical, social participation and others—and time to HIV seroconversion, which is when antibodies to the virus develop and it becomes detectable in the blood.

One thousand men tested negative for HIV infection at the beginning of the study. Of them, 28 eventually tested positive during the study period. Participants who remained free from HIV were more likely to receive personal and emotional, medical or social support through their social networks.

Limitations to the study include that participants received peer counseling, testing for HIV and [sexually transmitted infections](#), and care referrals, which could have contributed to a lower risk for HIV; the study measured perceived support rather than the actual amount of support participants received; and the study was limited to men living in large cities.

By suggesting that a greater level of support from friends and other social connections could help protect against acquiring HIV, the findings could be helpful for future HIV prevention projects.

The study was published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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