

HIV testing plummeted during pandemic

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Testing for [HIV](#) suffered a sharp setback during the first year of the pandemic, new government data shows.

The number of HIV tests funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and administered in health care settings dropped 43% between 2019 and 2020, the study showed. Tests administered in non-health care settings dropped 50% that same year.

The drop affected groups disproportionately affected by HIV, the CDC said, which highlights an urgent need to scale up testing and reduce disparities among those who could most benefit from HIV care.

"We welcomed 2020 with optimism. New HIV infections were declining, and attention to HIV was increasing. But just as COVID-19 disrupted our lives, it changed the course of HIV prevention," said Dr. Jonathan Mermin, director of the CDC's National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention.

"Now we are at a crossroads," he said in a CDC news release. "Will we accept the massive reductions in HIV testing, or will we bounce back stronger?"

In non-health care settings, testing declined 49% among gay and bisexual men, 47% among [transgender people](#), 46% among Hispanic and Latino people and 44% among Black people.

Calling HIV testing the bridge to highly effective treatment and prevention, the CDC said delayed diagnoses can lead to negative health consequences and increased HIV transmission.

The CDC recommends that everyone ages 13 to 64 should be tested for HIV at least once and that some should be tested at least annually.

These findings add to other concerning findings that showed a steep reduction in HIV diagnoses and a slowing of pre-exposure prophylaxis prescriptions ([PrEP](#)) from 2019 to 2020.

"Everyone should enjoy good health—and getting an HIV test is part of a successful plan to do so. Some people may not get tested for many reasons, such as concerns about HIV stigma, homophobia, transphobia and a host of other -isms and phobias. Or they may not know that an HIV test could benefit them," said Dr. Demetre Daskalakis, director of the CDC's Division of HIV Prevention.

"We must continue working together to overcome these and other factors that stand in the way of equitable HIV [prevention](#) and care," Daskalakis said in the release.

The CDC encouraged state, local, health care and community-based partnerships to increase access to testing services, with strategies such as [self-testing](#) and routine opt-out screening in health care settings.

[National HIV Testing Day](#) is June 27. Find fast, free and confidential HIV testing at the CDC's [Get Tested](#) or by calling 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636). HIV self-tests may be purchased at a pharmacy or online. Check to see if your local health department or another organization is providing a rapid self-test for a reduced cost or for free.

More information: Learn more about HIV at [HIV.gov](#).

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