

Researchers investigate possible rural-urban divide in HIV risk behaviors

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Although most newly diagnosed HIV patients in the United States live in cities, about 20% of new HIV infections are diagnosed in rural areas. Sexual minority males (gay, bisexual, queer and other men who have sex with men) make up the biggest proportion of new HIV cases.

Despite this elevated risk for infection, researchers know little about the sexual behaviors and use of sexual health care services in rural sexual minority male adolescents (ASMM).

A [new study](#) published in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior* compares HIV risk behaviors and HIV service use among ASMM in urban and rural parts of the United States.

"Having more information in this area is vital for creating targeted interventions to reduce sexually transmitted infection and HIV infection rates," said study author Christopher Owens, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Health Behavior at the Texas A&M University School of Public Health.

Owens and colleagues found that rural and urban ASMM were fairly similar in their sexual behaviors and sexual health service use overall, though there were some notable differences.

"We found that sexually active rural ASMM were less likely to use [condoms](#) compared to sexually active urban ASMM," Owens said, noting that people in rural areas tend to have less access to [HIV education and prevention](#) services that provide condoms and condom use education because of the greater distances involved. Additionally, [research has found that](#) rural health care providers are less comfortable offering sexual health care services to adolescents, which could affect the use of these services by adolescents.

"Possible interventions include increasing condom availability and [sexual education](#) in rural areas and using the internet to better educate rural ASMM about condom use," Owens said.

More information: Christopher Owens et al, Rural–Urban Differences in HIV Sexual Risk Behaviors and HIV Service Utilization Among Adolescent Sexual Minority Males in the United States, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-024-02840-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-024-02840-6)

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