African Americans Are Wrappers

Black communities set the pace for condom use.

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African Americans are at greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS than other groups. But don't let anyone tell you it's because of riskier behavior.

According to the Indiana University National Sex Study, African Americans are more likely than any other ethnic group to use condoms. Rates of condom use among black teenagers, for example, were higher than those of any other demographic—more than 90 percent among a small number of black teenagers the last time they engaged in vaginal intercourse.

The numbers are solid. The study surveyed a national representative sample of 14- to 94-year-olds, giving a more complete view of sex practices than recent sex studies, which targeted only certain populations.

So why such high marks for the black community? Study author Michael Reece, PhD, says one reason is that African Americans were more likely to self-identify as single. People in relationships are less likely to wrap up, regardless of race.

Reece also credits public health efforts that promote condom use, constantly reminding African Americans about their increased risk of contracting HIV.

And guess what? Condoms are still the best defense. Using condoms consistently and correctly reduces the risk of HIV—along with other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies. According to analysis done by The Cochrane Collaboration, evidence shows that in "real-life" scenarios, condoms reduced HIV transmission in heterosexual sex by at least 80 percent. All without side effects, prescription refills or high drug costs.

Condoms alone won't turn the tide on the HIV epidemic, though. The high rates of HIV in African-American communities create an unfortunate numbers game: If you're black and you slip up, your chances of contracting HIV are disproportionately high.

Even so, Reece says, "Condoms are the cheapest, most effective form of STI prevention."

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