Among Women Black Females Bear the Brunt of HIV

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When HIV was first identified, the virus was considered specific to men who have sex with men (MSM) and was therefore originally dubbed "gay-related immune deficiency," or GRID. However, medical cases soon proved that people of any sexual orientation or gender identity were at risk. In fact, recent statistics confirm that African-American women are more likely to contract the disease than women of other races.

Nowadays, about one in four people (22%) who live with HIV in the United States are female, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Moreover, despite the fact that Black women make up only 13% of the U.S. population, they represent 60% of the estimated 264,500 women who live with HIV in the United States, according to the Illinois Newsroom.

Like Black Americans overall, African-American women face structural barriers to accessing adequate health care. In addition to these issues, problems experienced by this population group includes increased poverty, difficulty accessing health care, reduced numbers of available sexual partners and unawareness of their HIV status, according to NBC.

"There are fewer men in the pool," Kim Parker, an HIV expert in Texas who has conducted research on the virus for over 20 years, said to the Newsroom. "African Americans tend to have higher rates of incarceration, homicide, things of that nature. So, there are few eligible men to women for Black relationships, for Black couples."

In addition, many individuals are unlikely to have insurance coverage, observed Amy Knopf, an HIV researcher and assistant professor at the Indiana University School of Nursing, who spoke to the news outlet.

"Black Americans are the least likely to be tested, the least likely to be linked to care once they are tested and found to be HIV positive and also the least likely to be adequately treated and virally suppressed,", Knopf said.

Although rates of new HIV diagnoses fell overall among heterosexual African-American women, Black women still contract the virus at elevated rates compared with white and Latino women.

In 2020, African-American women constituted 53% of newly diagnosed individuals in Indiana, the Newsroom stated.

Some women in states across the country may be unaware of the preventive treatment PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis. Moreover, if individuals are aware of the drug, they may not know that it is covered by most insurance plans (co-pay assistance is available) or that it is available for free for those who qualify through the Ready, Set, PrEP program, for example.

“Advances are being made, but it seems like the African-American community is missing out on some of those advances,” Michael Angarone, MD, an associate professor at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, told NBC.

For more on Black women and HIV, read “Do Microaggressions Affect the Health of Black Women With HIV?,” “Don’t Rush Black Women With Same-Day HIV PrEP Starts” and “Who Got Funding From HRSA’ s Black Women First HIV Initiative?”

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