Still a Numbers Game

What the latest HIV transmission stats really mean for some young folks

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The fact that fewer black women are contracting HIV, as noted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is good news. But there's still cause for alarm. HIV rates are increasing among young black men who have sex with men (MSM). "It is clear that our nation's prevention efforts are not reaching those that most desperately need them," says Kali Lindsey, director of legislative and public affairs for the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC). "We will never successfully realize an AIDS-free generation while our young people face such high rates of infection, especially young gay and bisexual men."

Lindsey feels the government must do more to ensure everyone, especially gay and transgender youth, has access to "culturally sensitive comprehensive sexual health services and education."

Other HIV health professionals echo these thoughts, especially those who believe that age-appropriate HIV prevention education should also be introduced in schools. According to a CDC report, 46 percent of high school students are sexually active and yet our nation's secondary schools fail to adequately tackle the issues of birth control, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Educating kids in grades 6 through 8 about these topics is particularly important, the CDC says, because most students in these grades haven't become sexually active. This information might help them avoid risky behaviors that could result in these problems. And it could also kill the misconceptions many kids still have about HIV.

Michael Ruppal, the executive director of The AIDS Institute, notes that we have the tools and White House leadership to stop the virus, but we also need congressional commitment to fund programs to help turn the tide on HIV.

"We know it will take some time," Ruppal says, "but with the proper policies and funding, we can envision an AIDS-free generation."

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