Poor Minority Men Are the Face of HIV/AIDS in U.S.

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Today, HIV in America overwhelmingly affects more poor, young black and Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) than any other community in the United States, The New York Times reports.

According to the latest statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 25 percent of new HIV infections in the United States are among men of color, though these men comprise much less than 25 percent of the U.S. population. When you look at men younger than 25 who recently got HIV through gay sex, nearly 80 percent of them are black or Latino.

Research showed that the groups most affected among minority communities include gay and bisexual men, transgender women, and men who consider themselves heterosexual but have had sex with men either unwillingly or not in shelters or prisons or for money.

Overall, however, the total new infection rates for the virus have continued to remain constant at 50,000 each year, despite huge advancements in HIV treatment among the middle class during the last decade.

Critics said that the latest wave of the epidemic is driven by health agencies' inattention to the African-American and Hispanic communities. "There wasn't even [a federal] ad campaign aimed at young black men until last year," said Krishna Stone, a spokeswoman for GMHC, an HIV advocacy and services group in New York City.

But health experts say young, gay African Americans are hard to reach because few have disclosed their sexual orientation to their families or communities because of stigma. What's more, when poor and homeless men who are out visit gay hangouts in their communities, they are often preyed upon to exchange sexual favors for money.

Minority MSM also had another risk factor that made them more likely to get infected: a lack of health insurance coverage. Without health insurance, many were less likely to see a doctor regularly, get tested for the virus, or to find treatment once infected.

CDC stats also revealed that many HIV-positive black and Latino men aren't virally suppressed,

meaning they aren’t taking antiretroviral drugs at all or are doing so on an irregular basis. These men have more of the virus in their body fluids, so they’re more likely to transmit HIV.

GMHC’s acting chief executive Janet Weinberg said the epidemic is, in many ways, still where it was 30 years ago even though “we have the tools to end it.”

For more information on HIV in the minority MSM community, click here.

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