CDC YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR REPORT DEMONSTRATES NEEDED ATTENTION TO GAY YOUTH

Behaviors Could Potentially Put Them at Higher Risk To HIV

Washington, DC – Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning high schoolers are engaged in activities that could potentially place them at a higher risk for HIV compared to their heterosexual counterparts, according to data released today by the CDC.

In the Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report (YRBS) the CDC found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual (gay) youth in every behavioral health risk measured were significantly higher than heterosexual high schools. In response to such questions as: ever having sex (gay, lesbian and bisexual high schools were 1.2 times higher than heterosexual high schools); more than four sex partners in their lifetime (1.6 times higher); used condoms last time had sex (.7 times lower); used illicit drugs (1.9 times higher); injected illegal drugs (3.4 times higher); and forced to have sex (4 times higher). The report also found that gay high schoolers were bullied at school almost 2 times more than heterosexual high schoolers, experienced persistent feelings of sadness at a rate of 2.3 times higher and were 3.6 times more likely to have seriously considered suicide.

“These startling statistics demonstrate that if we are going to prevent HIV in our country the needs and interests of gay youth cannot be ignored,” commented Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “Government resources, programs and policies must address gay and questioning youth in a comprehensive and respectful manner.”

Recent CDC data found that of all new HIV diagnosis in the U.S., those aged 13-24 account for 21 percent all new diagnoses, with most occurring among 20-24 year olds. Gay youth and gay young adults accounted for 84 percent of these diagnoses.

“We know how to prevent HIV, but we have to ensure that all youth, including those who are gay and questioning, are provided with the correct information and support needed
to take the necessary steps to prevent HIV and reduce their risk of becoming infected," continued Schmid. “This includes appropriately aged comprehensive sexual education that speaks to all youth, education regarding abstinence and the importance of condoms, along with PrEP, which was recently approved by the FDA for adolescents.”

The CDC concludes that the YRBS data finds that overall high schoolers are “making better decisions regarding sexual behavior and drug use but are still experiencing concerning levels of violence and mental health issues. Sexual minority youth continue to experience significant disparities and remain a major concern.” The report demonstrates that a number of high schoolers no matter their sexuality are at a higher risk of HIV. One indication to support that is that condom use has declined for all high schoolers.

In order to ensure the needs of high schoolers, including gay youth, are met, it is important that programs are fully funded and able to be implemented using evidenced based programing, including CDC’s HIV, STD, and Adolescent and School Health programs and HHS’ Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program.

Finally, the collection of this data is critically important to addressing the needs of our youth, including gay youth. In the future, The AIDS Institute hopes that it will be delineated by racial and ethnic groups, include transgender youth, and consider adding PrEP use as one of its questions.

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