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Health officials urge HIV testing for Riverside County residents

With World AIDS Day approaching, Riverside County health officials are urging residents to get tested for HIV in order to slow the spread of the illness, particularly among young people who make up more than one-quarter of the new cases.

Those between 13 and 24 represent more than a quarter of new HIV infections each year and 60 percent of these youth living with HIV are unaware they are infected, according to a [Vital Signs](#) report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released recently. The most-affected young people are young gay and bisexual men and African-Americans, the report says.

"This study demonstrates the importance of increasing testing for HIV and connecting those who are positive to treatment," said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, interim Riverside County public health officer. "HIV treatment is prevention, and the more people who are aware of their status, the more we can do to preserve their health and prevent further spread."

The analysis looks at the latest data on HIV infections, testing, and risk behaviors among young people and was published in advance of World AIDS Day on Saturday (Dec. 1).

Overall, an estimated 12,200 new HIV infections occurred in the United States in 2010 among young people aged 13-24, with young gay and bisexual men and African-Americans hit harder by HIV than their peers. In 2010, 72 percent of estimated new HIV infections in young people occurred in young men who have sex with men. By race/ethnicity, 57 percent of estimated new infections in this age group were in African-Americans.

Since 2002 there has been an average of 109 new HIV infections reported annually in Riverside County. During that period, about 80 percent of those new cases occurred among homosexual or bisexual men. The Riverside County Department of Public Health estimates there are more than 1,553 people living with HIV in Riverside County, although health officials suspect an untold number are infected but are unaware because they have not been tested.

According to CDC experts, a number of factors contribute to the high levels of HIV in young people and vary by population. Despite recommendations from CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics that call for routine HIV testing of youth in medical settings, the analysis shows that 35 percent of 18-24 year olds have been tested for HIV, while only 13 percent of high school students (and 22 percent of sexually experienced students) have ever been tested.

In Riverside County, the Desert AIDS Project has begun a campaign to increase HIV testing among those at greatest risk of catching and transmitting the disease. Get Tested Coachella is a collaboration among the Desert AIDS Project, Health Department, local hospitals, city government officials, community clinics and private physicians. This effort will help identify individuals who are unaware they are HIV infected and link them to care.

For information about Get Tested Coachella, please contact the Desert AIDS Project at 760-323-2118.

In observance of World AIDS Day, the county's HIV/STD Program will provide HIV testing at the Riverside campus of Riverside Community College on Saturday (Dec. 1), starting at 9 a.m.

For more information about HIV disease, HIV testing and testing for other STDs please call 1-800-243-7275 or visit www.rivcohiv aids.org

More information about the Vital Signs release is available at www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom.