



NCFH

National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc.



HIV/AIDS FARMWORKER FACT SHEET

HIV is a deadly disease that is still a major health threat in the United States and throughout the world. Lack of health care access due to legal, financial, geographical, and linguistic barriers coupled with a lack of material and social support resources cast migrant and seasonal farmworkers into a high-risk category for contracting HIV/AIDS. The migrant lifestyle, often characterized by constant mobility, geographic isolation, separation from family, lack of health education, and varying cultural attitudes and beliefs about sex safe sex practices further escalates these risks.

General HIV/AIDS Information

- In 2006, the cumulative estimated number of AIDS cases in the United States and its dependent areas totaled more than 1.1 million. The United States alone had an estimated 973,352 cases of adult and adolescent AIDS, with 80 percent male, 19 percent female and about 1 percent being children under 13 years of age.¹
- The cumulative estimated number of deaths of persons with AIDS through 2006 was 565,927, including 540,436 adults and adolescents and 5,369 children under 13 years of age.²
- The ethnic breakdown of AIDS cases through 2006 estimated 394,024 cases among non-Hispanic Whites, 409,982 cases among non-Hispanic African Americans, and 161,505 cases among Hispanics.³
- Hispanics represented about 13 percent of the total U.S. population in 2006 but accounted for 18 percent of the total number of new HIV/AIDS cases reported that year (6,356 out of 35,314). Furthermore, Hispanics made up 19 percent of the total number of new AIDS diagnoses in 2006.⁴
- The HIV diagnosis rate per 100,000 people in 33 states with confidential named-based reporting in 2006 put Hispanic males at a rate of 50.9, more than three times that of white males at 16.7, but less than the rate for African American males at 119.1. The HIV diagnosis rate per 100,000 people in 2006 put Hispanic females at 15.1, more than five times the rate of white females at 2.9, but less than African American females at 56.2.⁵
- Cumulatively, males accounted for 78 percent of AIDS cases reported among Hispanics in 2006 in the United States while the proportion of cases among females is rising. Sixty percent of Hispanics reported with AIDS in 2000 were born in the United States; of those, 42 percent were born in Puerto Rico.⁶
- From the beginning of the epidemic through 2006, 161,505 Hispanics in the United States have been reported as diagnosed with AIDS.⁷ For Hispanic/Latino men living with HIV/AIDS, the most common methods of HIV transmission include:
 - Sexual contact with other men at 45 percent of total cases
 - High-risk heterosexual contact at 25 percent of total cases
 - Intravenous drug user at 22 percent of total cases.
 - Sex with men AND injection drug use at 6 percent of total cases

- Among men born in Puerto Rico, injection drug use accounts for a significantly higher proportion of cases than male-to-male sexual contact.⁸
- By the end of 2006, an estimated 80,690 Hispanics/Latinos with AIDS in the United States had died. This makes HIV/AIDS the fourth leading cause of death among Hispanic men and women aged 35 to 44 years.⁹

Farmworker HIV/AIDS Information

Prevalence

- While data on farmworkers and HIV/AIDS is sparse and hard to determine, some researchers have identified infection rates that range from as low as 2.6 percent of farmworkers with HIV to as high as 13 percent.¹⁰ Though the accurate rate is unknown, it could be as high as 10 times the national average.¹¹
- A South Carolina study found a 13 percent seropositivity rate among 198 migrant workers tested for HIV and syphilis at migrant labor camps.¹² This contrasts with a 1987 study of migrant and seasonal farmworkers attending health clinics in North Carolina, which showed a 2.6 percent seropositivity rate.¹³
- In the summers of 1990 and 1991, a study of farmworkers tested for HIV after attending an hour-long AIDS prevention program in New Jersey labor camps indicated that 3.2 percent of the 554 workers tested positive for HIV. This rate is eight times higher than the national seroprevalence of 0.4 percent and eight times higher than the rate found in a 1988 study by the Centers for Disease Control.¹⁴ This is also about five and a half times higher than the national AIDS prevalence rate of 0.6 percent, as estimated by the CIA in 2003.¹⁵

Risk Factors and Behaviors

- Characteristics of farmworkers' migrant lifestyle can contribute to an increased risk of contracting HIV. These factors include constant mobility; cultural, linguistic, and geographic barriers to healthcare services; a change in sexual practices; limited education; psychosocial factors; isolation; separation from wives and families; discrimination; poverty; chronic underemployment; and substandard housing.¹⁶
- Certain behaviors also put migrant workers at risk for contracting HIV/AIDS, including sex with prostitutes, unprotected sex, needle sharing and the injection of drugs, antibiotics and vitamins.¹⁷

Knowledge, Attitudes & Beliefs

- Research shows that farmworkers have misconceptions and a low level of accurate knowledge about the transmission of HIV/AIDS. A 2003 study of Latino migrants in Eastern Washington found participants believed AIDS could be caused by kissing, bathing in the same shower or by using the same eating utensils as someone with AIDS, and also through mosquito bites, toilets, sharing toothbrushes and having poor hygiene.¹⁸
- A 2007 study of farmworkers in New York found that 33 percent believed that HIV is no longer a serious problem in the United States, 32 percent believed that HIV only affects gay men and drug users, 27 percent believed that a person should not have to be tested for HIV if he or she looks healthy and 13 percent believed that HIV/AIDS is curable.¹⁹
- Respondents in a study of 60 farmworker women visiting a health center in Virginia also lacked accurate knowledge about AIDS:
 - 52 percent of the respondents thought AIDS could not be transmitted from women to men

- 52 percent did not know if drugs were available to treat AIDS
 - 50 percent did not know AIDS could damage the brain or that it was a condition in which the body could not fight off disease
 - 23 percent did not know the answer to these questions.²⁰
- Certain cultural aspects have been found to be significant detriments to protection against HIV/AIDS. In a 2003 study of Latino migrant farmworkers, participants reported that sexual issues tend to be taboo and are not discussed between parents and children or husband and wife, thus leading to a lack of accurate HIV/AIDS knowledge. Also in that study, participants reported that it is a strong cultural belief that men can and should have multiple sex partners, even when married.²¹
 - Before bearing the cost of going to a doctor, many farmworkers will attempt self-treatment with herbal and folk remedies. Thus, HIV infection may not be diagnosed until AIDS-related disorders begin to manifest and HIV may be spread unknowingly by the HIV-positive patient.²²
 - Migration between Mexico and the United States has recently been highlighted as a source of rising HIV/AIDS rates in Mexico and Mexican officials now estimate that 30 percent of their country's HIV/AIDS cases are caused by migrant workers returning from the United States.²³ This is seen in the relationship between California, which has the highest HIV/AIDS incidence rate in the United States, and Jalisco, which has the highest number of migrants sent to the United States and the second-highest HIV/AIDS incidence rate in Mexico.
 - In migrant-sending communities in Jalisco, 76 percent of women had limited but accurate information regarding AIDS transmission, but few acknowledged condoms as an effective preventive measure. 34 percent felt at-risk for infection, yet 64 percent did nothing to prevent infection. When asked, 63 percent said they never used condoms, though 74 percent knew where to obtain them.²⁴

Unprotected Sexual Activity

- A common behavior that puts farmworkers at risk for contracting HIV/AIDS is unprotected sex, particularly sex with prostitutes.²⁵
- A 1997 study of migrant male farmworkers in San Diego found that 70 percent of sexually active farmworkers reported sex with a sex worker, of which only 23 percent reported using condoms.²⁶
- In a 1998 study on Mexican migrants, researchers found that fewer than half had ever used condoms, and of those who had been sexually active during the previous year, less than a third had used condoms each time. Seventy-five percent "almost never" carried condoms.²⁷ As for Mexican migrant women, a 2003 study found that of respondents who had two or more sexual partners, only 25 percent reported using a condom during sex.²⁸
- Mexican migrant women, as well migrant's wives who remain in their country of origin, are vulnerable to contracting HIV due to risky behaviors of their male sex partners, which include intravenous drug use, prostitution use without condoms, sex between men, and needle sharing. In a 2004 study researchers found that 75 percent of migrant men rarely or never used condoms with their wives.²⁹ Another study found that 75 percent of 159 female migrants reported never carrying condoms because it would be perceived as a sign of promiscuity.³⁰
- Sex between men is the highest HIV risk category in the United States and Mexico.^{30a} It has been well documented that minority men who have sex with men (MSM) in the United States are at an increased risk for HIV infection. For example, although in the year 2000 all men of color accounted for about a fourth (25%) of the male population, MSM of color accounted for nearly half of all AIDS (48%) and HIV (45%) cases acquired by male-to-male sex reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2000.^{30b} One study researching HIV risk in urban gay Latino men found that 17% self-identified as HIV-positive, 22% reported unprotected anal sex with at least 2 partners during the past year. Although not a migrant sample per se, the collected data in several

sites, including Los Angeles, where the gay men were predominantly Mexican immigrants.^{30c}

Intravenous Drug Use

- Injection drug use is an important cause of the transmission of blood borne infections, particularly HIV.³¹
- Because of the high price and inconvenience of physician visits, many farmworkers often purchase and use injectable vitamins and antibiotics from outside the United States. In border areas, many medications are readily available without a prescription or medical advice. Because they are thought to work fast, injections are popular and disposable syringes and needles are sometimes shared among family members.³²
- While injecting illegal drugs is relatively rare among migrant farmworkers, sharing needles to inject vitamins and antibiotics is more common.³³ In a study of 411 Mexican farmworkers, 20 percent reported self-administering lay therapeutic injections, 3.5 percent of whom shared needles with family members.³⁴ A 1997 study found similar results, with 12 percent of 532 Mexican farmworkers using lay injections to administer antibiotics or vitamins.³⁵
- A study of 176 Mexican farmworkers in Northern California found that 9 percent of female respondents reported having a sexual partner that used injection drugs.³⁶

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⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (31 March 2008). HIV/AIDS Among Hispanics/Latinos [Online]. Available: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/hispanics/resources/factsheets/hispanic.htm> [16 June 2008].

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2 June 2006). Cases of HIV Infection and AIDS in the United States, by Race/Ethnicity, 2000–2004 [Online]. Available: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/2006report/table5b.htm> [18 June 2008]

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⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1 April 2008). Cases of HIV Infection and AIDS in the United States and Dependent Areas, 2006 [Online]. Available: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/2006report/table3.htm> [18 June 2008]

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¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1988) HIV Seroprevalence in Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers North Carolina, 1987. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 37. 517-519.

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¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency (10 June 2008). *The World Factbook, United States* [Online]. Available: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html#People> [18 June 2008]

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