



October 2, 2008

Dear Colleague:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that on Friday, October 3, 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will publish an article in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* describing the estimated prevalence of HIV infection, or the total number of people living with HIV, in the United States. The article is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5739a2.htm>.

CDC's analysis reveals that more than a million people—an estimated 1,106,400 adults and adolescents—were living with HIV infection in the United States at the end of 2006. This analysis also reveals some important news about progress in our nation's fight against HIV/AIDS. Previously CDC had estimated that one in four individuals infected with HIV do not know their HIV status. Based on this new analysis, CDC now estimates that one in five—or roughly 21%—don't know their status. The reduction from 25% to 21% is reflective of more HIV-infected individuals getting tested and diagnosed and fewer deaths among people living with HIV. This is very good news, and although much more work needs to be done, we should all be extremely pleased to see this important sign of progress.

HIV testing plays a key role in reducing the impact of HIV and remains an essential first step in linking people living with HIV to medical care and ongoing support to help them maintain safer behaviors and reduce transmission. Studies indicate that once people are aware of their infections, most take steps to protect their partners from becoming infected. Thus, the reduction in the number of people who do not know their status reflects success in getting more people with undiagnosed HIV tested as well as success in the treatment of HIV disease. Despite this progress, CDC estimates that there are still approximately 232,700 individuals in the United States who do not know they have HIV.

Specifically, the article shows that in 2006:

- Persons infected through male-to-male sexual (MSM) contact accounted for nearly half (48%, or 532,000 persons) of all persons living with HIV in the United States in 2006.
- Persons infected through high-risk heterosexual contact accounted for over one quarter (28%, or 305,700) of all persons living with HIV.
- Persons infected through injection drug use accounted for 19% of all persons living with HIV (204,600 persons).
- African Americans accounted for 46% of those living with HIV.
- Whites accounted for 35% of those living with HIV.
- Hispanics and Latinos accounted for 18% of those living with HIV.
- Asians and Pacific Islanders accounted for 1% of those living with HIV.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives accounted for less than 1% of those living with HIV.

You may note that the estimated HIV prevalence for 2006 is about the same as the previously estimated number of people living with HIV in 2003. Because of changes in the data, the two estimates cannot be directly compared. Since the 2003 estimate, there have been improvements in the HIV reporting system: additional states have implemented named-based HIV reporting and the methods for de-duplication (to remove cases that might have been reported by more than one jurisdiction) have been improved. These improvements have allowed CDC to re-examine prevalence data for 2003, which is now estimated to have been 994,000 (lower than the prior estimate of 1,039,000 – 1,185,000).

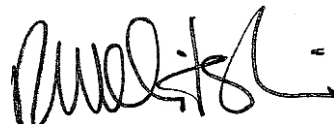
With more HIV-infected individuals living longer, and the expectation that HIV prevalence will continue to increase over time as treatments continue to prolong the lives of people living with HIV, it is critical that we reach those living with HIV with testing, medical care, and prevention services. Growing HIV prevalence also means increased opportunities for transmission to HIV-negative individuals. Efforts to reduce the number of new infections must therefore be designed to meet the needs of both infected and uninfected populations.

While the new estimates indicate that more infected individuals know their status, there are too many HIV-infected people in the United States who are diagnosed late in the course of infection – 38% within a year of developing AIDS. This represents far too many individuals who are unable to take advantage of life-saving treatments and prevention services that could drastically improve quality of life for themselves and their partners.

HIV testing and prevention strategies work when we apply what we know. While the total number of people living with HIV in the United States is increasing, data from a separate CDC analysis indicate that new infections have remained stable in recent years. This stability is an important sign of progress, since a growing number of people living with HIV would be expected to increase opportunities for HIV transmission. To slow the spread of HIV in the United States, action is needed on every front – from government, businesses, individuals, and communities – to increase access to testing and prevention in order to reach everyone in need.

For more information on HIV prevalence, including a fact sheet and questions and answers, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance>. Thank you for your continued commitment to HIV/AIDS prevention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard J. Wolitski". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Richard J. Wolitski, Ph.D.
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