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HIV diagnoses in Iowa hit new high

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The Gazette
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Iowa had the highest number of people diagnosed with HIV in 2007 since reporting began 10 years ago.

According to the Iowa Department of Public Health, the state had 127 HIV diagnoses last year, a 12 percent increase over the 113 in 2006, and exceeding the previous high of 117 when reporting began in 1998.

Randy Mayer, HIV/AIDS/Hepatitis program manager for the department, said the increase does not appear to be solely a result of more testing.

"I think it's a true increase," he said.

Mayer said apathy, more risky behavior and the role the Internet has played in finding sex partners are among the factors behind the upward trend.

Some of the people notified of their diagnosis only know their sex partner by their Web site profile, he said.

In 2007, 83 percent of new HIV diagnoses, or 106 cases, were men.

Men having sex with men remains the number one risk factor for the transmission of HIV in Iowa, followed by heterosexual contact.

Mayer noted that diagnoses among men aged 45 and older more than doubled since 2003.

Last year, 41 men in that age group were diagnosed, compared to 18 in 2003.

"Late testing," or waiting years after exposure to be tested for HIV, may be part of the reason behind that increase.

Mayer said people who acquire HIV may mistake the initial acute phase — a rash, fever and swollen glands that happen as the body reacts to the virus — for the flu. Eight to 10 years can pass before symptoms of AIDS are manifested.

He also cited the disproportionate number of cases among African Americans in Iowa.

Although African Americans make up only 2.5 percent of the state's population, 20 percent of those diagnosed last year were black.

Still, the majority of new HIV diagnoses and AIDS diagnoses in Iowa continues to be among white, non-Hispanics, accounting for 70 percent of HIV diagnoses (89 cases) and 65 percent of AIDS diagnoses (43 cases) in 2007.

As of the end of 2007, 1,548 Iowans were living with HIV or AIDS who were Iowa residents at time of diagnosis, a prevalence of 51.8 per 100,000 residents.

The Iowa Department of Public Health, through local partners, tested more than 8,000 people for HIV in 2007.

The department is funding several prevention projects targeting the men who have sex with men, including "moMENTum" in Johnson County.

Conducted by Johnson County Public Health, the program does formal outreach with a team of men who go to locations frequented by gay men to promote prevention. Peer-led group discussions are also held.

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are these newly diagnosed cases or are they newly reported cases ? i ask this because we have had an influx of people from out of state relocating to Iowa in the past few years. i wonder if the numbers show a collaboration between these sets of data.

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