

Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV/AIDS in Ontario

The number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Ontario has risen significantly from 17,656 people living with HIV/AIDS in 1999 to 24,251 in 2004. The increase is due to decreases in mortality and instability of the epidemic in specific populations.

There are four priority populations in Ontario – gay and bisexual men, Ontarians from African and Caribbean communities, injection drug users, and Aboriginal peoples.

In 2004 :

- There were an estimated 14,927 gay or bisexual men infected with HIV in the province. This accounts for 61.6 per cent of all HIV infected people. In the same year, gay and bisexual men represented 51 per cent of 1,694 new HIV infections, or 866.
- Ontarians from African and Caribbean communities accounted for 14 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS (3,356) and 19.5 per cent of new HIV infections, or 331.
- Injection drug users, male and female, accounted for 7.3 per cent of all people living with HIV/AIDS in the province (1,768) and 4.6 per cent of new HIV infections, or 78.
- Heterosexual men and women – who did not have a history of injection drug use, come from an African or Caribbean country or are gay or bisexual men – accounted for 14 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS in the province (3,367) and 21.8 per cent of new infections, or 369.

Ontario does not currently track HIV rates in Aboriginal communities however federal statistics indicate that HIV disproportionately impacts Aboriginal peoples.

Current Situation in Ontario

HIV Diagnoses

By the end of 2004, 26,033 people in Ontario had been diagnosed with HIV – an increase of 41 per cent since 1999 – and 8,267 had died. Based on these numbers, Ontario would appear to have approximately 18,000 people living with HIV in the province.

However – since not everyone who has HIV has been tested and diagnosed – these figures understate the number of people living with HIV or the prevalence of Ontario's HIV/AIDS epidemic. Epidemiologists estimate that, as of the end of 2004, there were 24,251 people living with HIV/AIDS in Ontario.

About 28 per cent of the people diagnosed with HIV in 2004 were women – an increase of 100 per cent compared to 1999. There was a 106 per cent rise in HIV diagnoses in Ontarians from African and the Caribbean countries, a 42 per cent in HIV for gay and bisexual men, and a 29 per cent increase in HIV for injection drug users. Many people diagnosed in 2004 would have been infected in previous years.

Mortality Rate Decreases

More people are living with HIV longer – since the introduction of anti-retroviral therapies in 1996, the number of HIV-related deaths has dropped by 75 per cent.

HIV Infections

Infection Rate Increases

New infections – epidemiologists estimate there were a total of 1,694 new HIV infections in Ontario in 2004, a 30 per cent increase in HIV incidence (i.e., the number of people infected each year) compared to 1999.

Between 1999 and 2004, the total number of people infected with HIV increased significantly in people from African and Caribbean countries (82 per cent) and in gay and bisexual men (29 per cent). Increases in infections in gay and bisexual men have been documented since 1996.

Ontario does not collect data on the proportion of people diagnosed with HIV who are Aboriginal. However, Health Canada reports that Aboriginals represent 2.8 per cent of the Canadian population but in the first six months of 2002, they constituted 10 per cent of new AIDS cases in Canada.

People Living With HIV Don't Know They're Infected

About three out of every 10 people living with HIV in Ontario don't know they are infected. Since it's possible to live for many years with HIV without experiencing symptoms, many people do not seek testing. This means people may be unknowingly transmitting HIV.

Prenatal Testing Program

In the late 1990s, Ontario introduced voluntary pre-natal HIV testing for all pregnant women and women planning pregnancies. The proportion of women being tested increased from 34 per cent in 1999 to 88 per cent in 2005. As a result of this testing, an estimated 50 HIV transmissions from mothers to infants have been prevented.

Ontario's HIV Testing Programs Provide Choice

The stigma associated with HIV results in many people deciding not to be tested for HIV. To help overcome this barrier, Ontario offers three choices:

- Nominal testing, where the test is ordered using the person's name
- Non-nominal testing, where the test is ordered using a code known only to the health care provider ordering the test who knows the person's identity
- Anonymous testing, where the test is ordered using a code and the person ordering the test does not know the name/identity of the person being tested.

In 2004, 89 per cent of HIV tests in the province were ordered nominally (positivity rate: 0.28 per cent); eight per cent were ordered non-nominally (positivity rate: 0.80 per cent); and three per cent were ordered anonymously (positivity rate: 1.16 per cent).

Based on these results, it appears that people at higher risk of HIV infection prefer to be tested anonymously.

For information on HIV epidemiology in Ontario:
<http://www.phs.utoronto.ca/ohemu/mandate.html>

AIDS and Sexual Health Info Line 1-800-668-2437

TTY 1-800-387-5559

HIV/AIDS in Ontario

The Ontario government will spend more than \$54 million in 2006 on HIV/AIDS related programs. This does not include physician billings to the Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP) or drugs covered through the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) formulary for HIV/AIDS treatment and services.

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funded programs include:

- More than 80 organizations and initiatives across the province that deliver HIV/AIDS education and support programs targeted to communities such as gay men, hemophiliacs, aboriginal communities, street youth, women and children, deaf people, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, and injection drug users.
- The Ontario HIV Treatment Network, an independent multi-stakeholder agency that develops research expertise in a number of HIV/AIDS-related areas. Visit www.ohtn.on.ca for more information.
- Twenty-six province-wide anonymous HIV testing sites that offer pre-test and post-test counselling, including information on risk reduction, partner notification and referral.
- Supportive housing for people with HIV/AIDS and programs that provide volunteer-based in-home hospice care, and a supportive housing program for people with HIV who have mental health concerns.
- \$1.5 million in financial support for the XVI International AIDS Conference and an additional \$1 million in scholarships to help over 400 Ontarians living with HIV/AIDS, providers and community-based agencies attend and participate fully in the conference.
- Fourteen HIV outpatient clinics across the province that provide multi-disciplinary care for people living with HIV/AIDS.
- A prenatal testing program where HIV testing is offered with informed consent to all pregnant women in Ontario. The initiative funds a communications campaign to promote awareness of the HIV prenatal testing program among pregnant women, HIV test providers and women considering pregnancy. Since 1999, test uptake has increased from 34 per cent to almost 88 per cent.
- Programs like Oasis, at the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre in Ottawa, which offers integrated HIV/AIDS health and social service support for people at risk of HIV infection and persons living with HIV.
- The Ontario Ministry of Health AIDS and Sexual Health Info Line (1-800-668-2437) provides province-wide information and anonymous counselling, as well as referral to community service agencies on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, safer sex options and harm reduction in intravenous drug use. The Info Line received 31,233 calls in 2005, with calls being answered in English and sixteen other languages. The hours of operation are 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Monday to Friday and 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.
- All HIV diagnostic testing in Ontario (HIV, prenatal HIV and viral load testing) is conducted through the Central Public Health Laboratory, which ensures a high standard of testing and provides the ministry with data analysis capabilities.
- Casey House, a 12-bed residence and home hospice program for people with HIV/AIDS at the end stages of their lives. Casey House offers medical and nursing care, counselling, nutrition, massage therapy and other services.
- The Injection Drug User Outreach Program, which provides community-based prevention resources and education to injection drug users who are at risk of contracting HIV and HCV (Hepatitis C virus) infection.

- The Community-Linked Evaluation AIDS Resource Unit, which supports research and evaluation of community-based HIV programs across the province.
- Public health programs on sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Laboratories and physicians report HIV to the local medical officer of health and health unit staff collaborate with physicians for case management including partner notification and condom distribution. In addition, public health units offer 27 needle exchange programs. Public health units also collaborate with school boards to provide education to students about HIV/AIDS.
- Vaccinations against pneumonia, meningitis and chicken pox for children living with HIV/AIDS.
- The HIV Assistance Program which provides financial compensation for individuals infected with HIV through the blood supply.

Other Initiatives Include:

Gay and Bisexual Men

- A new provincial HIV prevention strategy for gay/bisexual/transsexual men in Ontario. The strategy uses evidence-based information to improve gay men's HIV prevention. It also includes a public awareness campaign called "Be Real." For more information, visit www.ru4real.ca
- The ministry is supporting the work of the Ethno-racial men who have sex with men (MSM) Research Working Group, a committee of researchers and community organizations who are developing ways to strengthen research in Ontario specific to MSM from diverse ethnic and racial communities.
- The Syphilis Task Force - a coalition of community AIDS organizations and sexual health clinics, Toronto and Ottawa Public Health, researchers, ministry officials – which is interested in ensuring an effective response to a syphilis outbreak in gay men in Ontario, primarily in Toronto and Ottawa.
- The Crystal Meth, Gay Men and HIV Risk Forum (hosted by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in May 2005) brought prevention educators, addictions and gay health services, researchers, public health practitioners and funders together to examine the relationship between crystal meth use and HIV risk behavior in gay men and to discuss responses to crystal meth use in gay communities around the province.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is currently participating in a local initiative to address this issue in Toronto's gay community.

Ontarians from African and Caribbean Countries

- The ministry supports the work of the African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO), including funding a coordinator position to assist in implementing recommendations contained in the "Strategy to Address Issues Related to HIV Faced by People in Ontario from Countries Where HIV/AIDS is Endemic." This strategy was launched in April 2005 and includes a public awareness campaign called "Keep it alive." For more information, visit www.preventaids.ca

Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy

- The ministry provides funds to the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy to promote HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment, and support work among off-reserve Aboriginal populations.

Injection Drug User Outreach Program

- The government funds injection drug use outreach workers who work across the province to prevent the spread of HIV among people who use injection drugs.

Women and HIV/AIDS Working Group

- The ministry supports a provincial working group to address increased rates of HIV among women in Ontario. As part of this work, the ministry supports research into best practices in HIV prevention in women and research to determine where women are most likely to access health care and social services.

For more information on HIV/AIDS programs in Ontario, please visit:

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TTY 1-800-387-5559

www.health.gov.on.ca/AIDS2006

www.health.gov.on.ca/SIDA2006

or contact the AIDS Bureau:

**AIDS Bureau, Community Health Unit
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
393 University Avenue, Suite 2100
Toronto, ON M5G 1E6**

Tel.: 1-800-268-6066 or 416-327-8797