

Sexual Risk Behaviours of Canadians

Introduction

Sexual behaviour is one of the main determinants of the transmission of HIV in Canada. Therefore, it is important to understand sexual behaviour at the population level to assess the potential for the spread of HIV and to help target and evaluate prevention programs. This report updates information on the sexual behaviour of the general Canadian population and the implications for prevention of HIV infection.

Multiple partners and condom use in the general population: room for improvement

- Recent Canadian surveys of adults aged 20 to 45 show that 12-19% of men and 6-7% of women had two or more sex partners in the past year.
- Of those who reported sexual intercourse with a non-regular partner in the previous year, only 26% of men and 19% of women reported that they always used condoms with non-regular partners. The remainder either never used condoms or used them inconsistently.

Adolescent sexual behaviour: an area of concern

- Approximately 50% of Canadian 17 year-olds have had sexual intercourse.
- A 1992 survey in western Canada found that 55% of 17 year-old boys have had sexual intercourse and of those, 33% have had 4 or more partners. 52% of 17 year-old girls have had sexual intercourse and 30% of this group had 4 or more partners.
- 57% of 17 year-old boys and 45% of 17 year-old girls used a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse.
- As the HIV epidemic evolves, more and more infections are occurring in young people. The Bureau of HIV/AIDS and STD has estimated that between 1975 and 1984, the median age of HIV infection in Canada was 29.6 years. Between 1985 and 1990, the median age of infection was estimated to be 24.5 years.
- Surveillance data on the incidence of other sexually transmitted diseases can also provide a measure of the extent of unprotected sexual behaviour in a population. Over 36,000 cases of chlamydia were reported in Canada in 1995. Among women, girls aged 15-19 have the highest rates of infection for chlamydia and gonorrhoea.