

# Facts About...

## HIV/AIDS in Heterosexuals



**SUMMARY:** The proportion of HIV infections of known risk attributable to heterosexual transmission is rising in King County (6% 1996-1998 versus 11% 2002-2004) as well as the U.S. as a whole. Heterosexually contracted HIV is the leading route of infection among women, and is more common among People of Color.

**DEFINITION:** For epidemiologic purposes, HIV transmission is considered heterosexually-acquired only when the infected person is a) not a male who has sex with males, b) does not inject drugs, and c) has a heterosexual partner who is an injection drug user, a bisexual male, or known to be HIV-infected. A person who identifies as heterosexual but does not acknowledge a specific partner at risk, is considered 'undetermined risk' and is not counted as heterosexually-acquired. For this reason we may consider surveillance data to be a lowest estimate of heterosexually-acquired infection.

### STATUS AND TRENDS IN HIV/AIDS CASES:

- The proportion of HIV diagnoses attributed to heterosexual transmission is increasing (Figure 1). During 2002-2004, 11% of new diagnoses of HIV infection with known risk were attributed to heterosexual contact, compared with 6% of diagnoses 1996-1998.

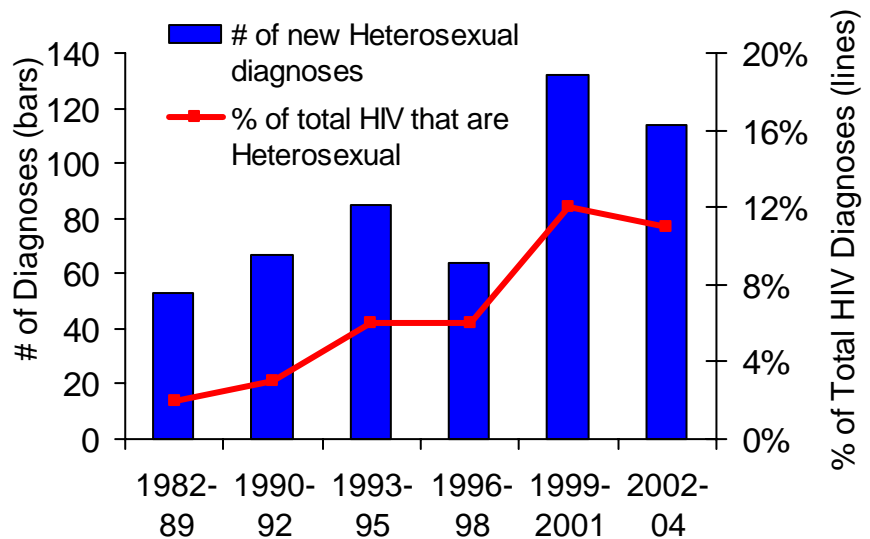
- While the overall number of people diagnosed with HIV infection appears level at 350-400 persons each year, the number of HIV diagnoses attributed to heterosexual transmission continues to climb. There were over 35 diagnoses annually 2002-2004 (this number may still be incomplete), compared with just 21 each year in 1996-1998.

- Cases attributed to heterosexual transmission are more common among women, Blacks, residents of King County outside Seattle, and persons residing in Washington counties outside of King County. While 23% of cases among Blacks are heterosexually-acquired, only 4% of cases among Whites are heterosexually-acquired. The increase in the proportion of heterosexual cases over time correlates with the parallel increases for women and Blacks.

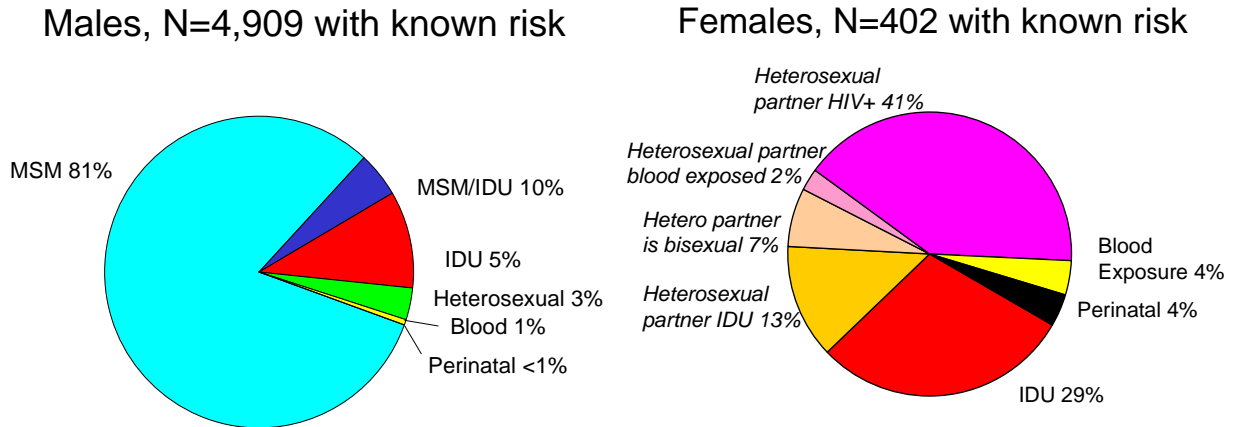
- Among people with a known risk for HIV, heterosexual transmission accounts for 47% of HIV diagnoses among women, but just 3% of diagnoses among men (see Figure 2).

- The majority of women with known HIV risk were infected heterosexually (63%), including women with a male partner with HIV but whose risk was unspecified (41%). Fewer male partners injected drugs (13%), were bisexual (7%), or were infected through receipt of blood products (2%, see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Number and Percent of New HIV Diagnoses among Heterosexuals, 1982-2004



**Figure 2: King County Residents Living with HIV or AIDS by Gender and Exposure Category, as of 9/30/2005**



**POPULATION SIZE:**

- The estimated King County population of 15-69 year-old heterosexuals is 1,245,000 (derived from the 2000 Census for ages 15-69, minus an estimated 40,000 MSM in these ages). This is likely an overestimate as it includes women with female partners and people who are not sexually active.

**HIV PREVALENCE:**

- There are an estimated 560 King County residents living with heterosexually-acquired HIV infection. In addition, an estimated 620 HIV infections are among heterosexuals who acquired infection through use of injection drugs and an estimated 70 infections are among heterosexuals who acquired HIV through receipt of blood products.
- Based on the above estimated number of cases among heterosexuals, roughly 0.1% of the King County heterosexual population in the age range of 15-69 years is estimated to be HIV-infected. Most HIV infections among the heterosexual population were acquired through injection drug use, or blood exposure.
- Among both female and male non-drug-injecting heterosexual clients seen at the Harborview Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Clinic from 1998-1999, the HIV prevalence was 0.3%. People attending an STI Clinic are at higher risk for HIV infection than the general population.

**OTHER MEASURES OF RISK:**

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are an indirect indicator of unprotected sexual activity that could result in transmission of HIV. Due to more acute onset of symptoms for most other STIs compared to HIV, these data may provide more timely information on behavioral trends in the community. The vast majority of gonorrhea and chlamydia infections in King County are heterosexually transmitted.
- In 2002, the reported rate of sexually transmitted gonorrhea in King County was 256 per 100,000 in 15-24 year-olds. The rate among 15-24 year-old Blacks (1,329/100,000) was twelve times greater than that among Whites (105/100,000) of the same age.
- In 2002, King County chlamydia rates were 1,347 per 100,000 persons aged 15-19 compared to 618 per 100,000 in 25-29 year-olds.
- In the HIV Testing Survey conducted at a local STD clinic in 2000, half of both men and women surveyed said they never used condoms during sexual intercourse with their heterosexual partner(s).