

New HIV Estimates for the United States

Part Two: Interview with Dr. Richard Wolitski

This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

Why is the new estimate so different from the past one?

[Wolitski] “The past estimates were based on the best available information that we had at that time. The current estimate is based on new technology that only became widely available in 2005. With this new technology, we are now able for the first time to be able to directly measure which infections have newly occurred in the United States. It’s this new information that’s going to allow us to better target our HIV prevention efforts and to better monitor the impact of those efforts over time.”

What does the new estimate tell us about populations impacted by HIV?

[Richard Wolitski] “These new data confirm what we’ve known for some time about the disproportionate impact of HIV in the United States. They show that gay and bisexual men of all races and ethnicities and black men and women are most severely affected. In 2006, 53 percent of new infections were among men who have sex with men, and there were higher rates of HIV infection among African Americans. These rates were 7 times higher compared to whites and 3 times higher compared to Hispanics, who are also disproportionately affected by the epidemic. These data confirm the need for us to reinvigorate and to focus our HIV prevention efforts on these critical populations.”

What can we learn from the new estimate that helps direct future strategies?

[Richard Wolitski] “This new estimate is a wake-up call. It’s a reminder of the severity of the epidemic in the United States and that the epidemic continues to be a significant threat to public health in this country. These new data show that the HIV epidemic is and has been, for some time, worse than previously known. As a result, we need to reevaluate our HIV prevention efforts and make sure that they match the magnitude of this crisis. We need to make sure that all persons who are at risk for contracting HIV receive HIV testing and prevention services.”

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